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FOUR SHORT PLAYS

FOUR SHORT PLAYS

BY
LADY BELL

*Bell, Florence Emily,
"Elspore" (see pp. 1-11),
1851-1930.*

1. THE STORY OF RACHEL.
2. KIRSTIN.
3. THE PARACHUTE.
4. A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

LONDON
ARTHUR L. HUMPHREYS
187 PICCADILLY, W.
1922

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To
SYBIL THORNDIKE.

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THE STORY OF RACHEL.

THE STORY OF RACHEL.

A Play in One Act.

Characters:

CAPTAIN WILLIAM CARTERET, R.N. (about 48).

RACHEL (*his wife*, 28).

*A maid—not a speaking part—who only
brings in a letter.*

RACHEL and CARTERET sitting in their comfortable drawing room, RACHEL in armchair R.C. near a table, cutting a book with a paper-knife. CARTERET on small sofa, L.C., with a little table near him on which is an ash-tray. He is smoking, and reading the “Pall Mall Gazette.”

RACHEL [*continuing conversation as the curtain goes up*]. Don’t you agree with what I’m saying? I’m sure men are like that. Will, do you mean to say you don’t agree?

CARTERET [*absently, looking up and down columns of paper*]. Yes, I daresay.

RACHEL. I know quite well what it means when a man says in that way [*imitating his tone*]—‘Yes, I daresay,’ and goes on reading. It means you’re not thinking of what I’m saying—you’re thinking of nothing but the paper.

CARTERET [*still looking up and down the columns*]. Well, there are very interesting things in the paper.

RACHEL. Of course there are. And it’s still more interesting trying to guess which of them are true.

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But still it is rather boring that you should be reading the newspaper while I'm talking.

CARTERET. Oh? I thought you were talking while I was reading the newspaper.

RACHEL. That is a one-sided view, I must say.

[CARTERET smiles, shakes the ash off his cigarette, and goes on reading without speaking].

RACHEL. It is a pity you don't enjoy my society, isn't it?

CARTERET [smiling]. A great pity.

RACHEL. Will, I suppose that you like me as I am?

CARTERET. Absolutely and entirely. Even when you talk unceasingly when I'm having a quiet read and smoke before dressing for dinner.

RACHEL. Anyhow, you'd have to be interrupted soon, because you must go up when the clock strikes, and see Mary in bed.

CARTERET [laughing happily]. Yes, the little monkey. I should never hear the end of it if I didn't. She's a tremendous tyrant, isn't she.

RACHEL. Yes. I wonder what she'll be like when she grows up.

CARTERET [smiling]. Like her mother, I daresay. Apt to talk when her husband's reading.

RACHEL. To-night I want to talk. Do listen, Will—just this once!

[CARTERET smiles and puts his paper down on his knee]

CARTERET. Just this once, if you're sure it won't happen again.

RACHEL. I was thinking about what men are like, and what women are like.

CARTERET. You see, men don't want to be taking their souls to pieces perpetually as women do, to see what they're made of.

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RACHEL. But it is so interesting to do it, even if one's afraid of what one finds there.

CARTERET. Afraid !

RACHEL. Oh, yes. There are times when I'm thinking of things, when I'm all over the place. I can't help it.

CARTERET. All over the place ! Yes, that's quite true. You are.

RACHEL. Well, as I said, I've been thinking—and I see that in heaps of ways men and women are so different.

CARTERET. That's a very profound remark. Don't get beyond my depth, Rachel, pray.

RACHEL. Will, you horrid old thing ! But I don't care for your laughing at me. I'll go on. Men are so simple —

CARTERET. And women so complicated ? . . .

RACHEL. Sometimes. Men take things and people for granted so much more than women do—sailors I do believe especially, are made like that. You take things for granted ; you like everybody ; you believe in everybody.

CARTERET. Well, my experience has shewn me that you come fewer croppers in life if you believe in people, than if you're suspicious of them. It may be an illusion, but that's my experience.

RACHEL. I wonder ? And there is another great difference. Women—so many women—are cowards ; afraid, always afraid.

CARTERET. Afraid of what, you foolish creature ?

RACHEL. Of all sorts of things. I was full of terrors when I was a child. Not only of robbers and ghosts, of absurd things that never happened, but of people, who were cross or unkind of everything. And then I was left by myself, and I was poor, and had to earn my own living. It was dreadful.

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CARTERET. Well, that's all over. You needn't think of it any more. I'll take care of you, never fear. Nothing and nobody shall frighten you now.

RACHEL. Oh, I know. I've always felt what a rock of defence you were ever since that first evening, when we had broken down in the motor and you stopped yours beside us in the dark.

CARTERET. And found you, the pretty little governess, by the side of the road with the son of the house ! having broken your employer's motor. By George, you looked frightened then. I don't think I ever saw a more woebegone little object than you were, standing there huddled together, looking as if you were trying to escape from the lights of the motor.

RACHEL [*shuddering*]. Yes, those horrible lights that would keep blazing away all round us, and oh, I did so want to hide, to sink under the earth, never to be found again !

CARTERET. Come, come, it wasn't as bad as that : though I must admit it was pretty awful when we had to go back and face your infuriated employer.

[RACHEL *shudders at the thought*].

CARTERET. I think she had a case, mind you ! Going out for a joy ride with her son at that time of night in her car !

RACHEL. Oh, the rapture of that moment when you stood up for me, and then, when you found out you had known my dad !

CARTERET. Rather a good moment, that—a trump card, wasn't it ?

RACHEL. I can hear you saying it now, 'Tom Farrar, my old shipmate.' Oh, the relief of it ! the relief !

CARTERET [*smiling*]. Poor little girl !

RACHEL [*recovering herself*]. But we needn't think about it ; and you were there, and you brought

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me back with you, and then, as they say in the fairy tales, we married and lived happily ever after.

CARTERET. Except that I had to go off to the Cape directly afterwards. Good Lord! How I used to laugh at the other men on board, when they were wanting to go ashore to see their wives and babies, or to come back home when they were aboard. I used to think what fools they were; but they weren't. I was the fool all right. And now I know better—I have done just the same. And after getting that splendid ship I was so proud of, and after always saying that I would not take a shore-going job for the world, I jumped at this job at the Admiralty just to be near you and Mary, and, oh, I am so glad I did.

RACHEL [*caressingly*]. We are awfully happy, aren't we?

CARTERET. Awfully.

RACHEL [*musingly*]. Mary—Mary—[she says the name twice]. How I love that child! I love her absurdly, fiercely. If I tried to love her more I couldn't. I have sometimes a wild sense of the joy of having her that makes me afraid of fate . . . [She speaks on in a more ordinary tone]. Men aren't like that, I daresay.

CARTERET [*smiling*]. No, I don't believe they are. They just love and love their child, that's all.

RACHEL. Yes, that's all. And that's everything.

CARTERET [*smiling*]. And that's everything.

[RACHEL sitting looking before her—CARTERET leaning back in his chair looking up at ceiling; not at her]

CARTERET. That night, at Simonstown, that I got your telegram saying the child was born, that you had a daughter—it was so wonderful, so impossible to understand. That night I remember, after I knew, I went for a blow on the quarter deck quite late, before

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turning in—in the sort of dark it is out there when the sky is deep purple and the huge stars are blazing in it like holes opening into glory—and I kept saying to myself, A child ! I have a child—my child ! I really believe for a while I was almost mad. It seemed to me that the splash of the sea, the choppy little waves beating against the gangway ladder were answering me, were saying the same thing, too—my child ! Life had changed in that hour. And I wondered if I could go on waiting, waiting for the moment when I should be with you both. I didn't tell any of them about it out there. I didn't trust myself. I didn't know what I should say if I began to speak of it.

RACHEL [smiling]. You'd have been all over the the place.

CARTERET [*trying to hide his emotion*]. I believe I should, for once. Good old Tom ! I was with him when he died in the East. He would have been glad to know I had got his little girl out of a scrape.

RACHEL. And that you had married her.

CARTERET. Well . . . he would have thought me a bit old for you, perhaps.

RACHEL. You're not to say that ! You're just the right age.

CARTERET. You really think so ?

RACHEL. Of course I do.

CARTERET [*still smiling*]. Now, Rachel, were you in love with that young Thornton ?

RACHEL. No, I don't think I was. It was a boy and girl sort of thing.

CARTERET [*smiling, but sighing too*]. Yes, boy and girl. I suppose when there are young people together that sort of thing happens.

RACHEL. Oh, don't say it in that tone. You don't mean to say you're jealous of him—because he was young ?

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CARTERET [*more seriously*]. Jealous? Of you? Of my wife? No.

RACHEL. Well, some people are. They always are in books.

CARTERET. I'm not in a book, and that sort of thing isn't good enough for me. [*Goes on in an ordinary tone*]. I wonder what became of Thornton. Have you ever heard anything of him?

RACHEL [*with an impulse*]. Will, how different you are from other people!

CARTERET [*surprised*]. Why?

RACHEL. You find me on the road in the dark with a young man. How do you know I was not running away with him?

CARTERET [*smiling*]. Well, if you were, you weren't doing it very successfully. To tell the truth, there were so many things to think of that night after fettling up the motor and taking you back, that I hadn't time to wonder what you were after. [A pause].

RACHEL. As a matter of fact, I have heard something about Jack Thornton—he's dead.

CARTERET [*interested but not suspicious*]. Dead! How do you know?

RACHEL. I saw it in an evening paper six weeks ago. It was a night you were away inspecting at Portsmouth or something. I meant to tell you. It was a horrible story. He was in East Africa—he went there to farm—he was one of a party who had a skirmish with some natives—they had quarrelled about something and he and another Englishman were killed.

CARTERET [*sympathetically*]. Oh, a bad business. Yes. I am sorry.

RACHEL [*impulsively*]. I was not, very—I couldn't bear to think of all that time he had been mixed up in. No, when I heard that he was dead, it

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was a relief. I don't want to be reminded of him—to be reminded of all that time. Oh, Will, if you knew what the sense of security and happiness is of being married to you. I do love you.

CARTERET. I'm very glad to hear it. Look here; confess you weren't in love with me when we married.

RACHEL. We married so very soon, you see. I hadn't time.

CARTERET. You didn't fall in love at first sight as I did.

RACHEL. But I was as quick as I could. Before we had been married a month I adored you.

CARTERET. Did you really, Rachel?

RACHEL. You know I did.

CARTERET. Yes, I know it too, but I like hearing you say it.

RACHEL. You ought to believe it by this time without having to be told.

CARTERET. Of course I do. Oh, Rachel—I wonder if you know the absolute trust I have in you. How I love and reverence you more than I can put into words, and how I wonder every day at the great gifts that have come to me from you and the child. My life is overflowing with happiness—and when I think of those lonely days when I was going ahead thinking I had got all I wanted, and I had nothing!—darling, I must try to be worthy of it all.

[*He stands up by her. She holds out her hand to him. He takes it in both his, then they part as the maid comes in with a letter. CARTERET takes it, looks at it, and throws it down on the table.*]]

RACHEL [speaking very lightly as the maid goes out]. Nothing for me; how dull the evening post always is.

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CARTERET. You shall have half of mine ; it looks fearfully dull, too.

RACHEL. Yes, a letter of that shape always is. It's about business, I suppose.

[*She leans back in her chair and goes on cutting the book with a paper-knife.*]

CARTERET [*trying to open the letter*]. And then the brutes stick it down so that you can't get it open.

RACHEL [*laughing*]. No great loss, I daresay. Here !

[*She throws him the paper-knife and leans back idly, comfortable in her chair. CARTERET takes the knife and cuts it open.*]

CARTERET [*excited*]. Oh ! Rachel !

RACHEL [*interested but not anxious*]. What is it ? Who's it from ?

CARTERET [*reading the name at the top of the paper*]. It's from Threlfold and Bixley, solicitors. They're—[*then he looks at RACHEL as though hesitating to speak the name suddenly*]—Jack Thornton's solicitors.

[RACHEL aghast stands up transfixed—CARTERET is so full of the letter that he doesn't look at her.]

CARTERET. Listen ! ‘ Dear Sir—We have to inform you that we have received from East Africa the will of our late client, Mr John Thornton, deceased, in which he instructs us that a third of the fortune he acquired there, is to be assigned, on her twenty-first birthday, to Mary Carteret, his [*he is going to turn over the page when RACHEL rushes forward with a shriek*]]

RACHEL [*beside herself*]. Wait, wait ! don't turn over ! wait—stop—I want to tell you something—first—say you won't look—

CARTERET [*amazed*]. Rachel ! [Getting up].

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What is it? You are not well! Is it hearing about this so suddenly? [He makes a movement. She thinks he is going to turn the page].

RACHEL. Don't, don't! you promised, you promised you wouldn't. I want to tell you what is on the next page before you read it—I know how it goes on—' Mary Carteret his—child !'

CARTERET [alarmed]. Rachel! what has happened to you?

RACHEL [compelling herself to speak less wildly; with concentrated utterance]. Mary Carteret is his child—Jack Thornton's child. Yes! Mary—is—Jack Thornton's child.

[A silence—CARTERET stands looking at her.

CARTERET [seizing her wrists]. It isn't true! [She stands silent]. Is it true?—is it?

RACHEL. Oh! you hurt me.

CARTERET. Is it true?

RACHEL [looking straight at him]. Yes. Read it. Turn over the page now.

[CARTERET has the letter in his hand still. He looks at the bottom of the page he has read and turns it over with shaking hands, and reads what is on the next].

RACHEL [almost beside herself]. Now you know it's true. You see yourself what it says.

[CARTERET waits a moment, gazing at the page, then looks up at her].

CARTERET. It doesn't say so.

RACHEL [petrified, looks at him, her lips forming the words, almost in a whisper]. Doesn't say so!

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CARTERET. No ! [reading]—‘ to Mary Carteret—his [pause] god-child !’

RACHEL [gives a smothered cry]. Oh ! It’s not in the letter—and I told you—I myself . . .

CARTERET [with a sudden impulse of hope]. Rachel, I still don’t believe it. You don’t know what you are saying.

RACHEL. Yes, yes, I tell you, it’s true—and I’ve told you—I did—if I hadn’t, you wouldn’t have known.

CARTERET. What—it is true then ! and that is all you can think of—that you needn’t have told me—that if you had not, you could have gone on pretending. . . .

RACHEL. We should have gone on being happy—and—now it’s gone.

CARTERET. Happy—you could have lived with that lie in your heart and have been happy ?

RACHEL. The lie was buried—he was dead—I was safe [wringing her hands]. We were happy, we should always have been happy now he is dead.

CARTERET. But the truth ! Do you care so little about the truth ?

RACHEL. The truth can be so terrible.

CARTERET. Is that what women are like ?

RACHEL. Oh, women are afraid. All these years I have been so terrified—so haunted by terror—till I knew he was dead. Then—then—I thought I was safe. I used to think—suppose—suppose, you ever came to know it ! I tried to tell you, at first, I did, indeed, but my heart died at the thought. . . . And then when I fell in love with you and saw how desperately you cared for Mary —

CARTERET [he shrinks]. Don’t —

RACHEL. I couldn’t—and then, I thought it was

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in the letter—and you'd see it, and so I told you—I told you.

CARTERET [*looking at the letter and reading*].
‘ His god-child ’—is that true?

[RACHEL shakes her head.]

CARTERET. A lie, too, like all the rest? Oh, my God! [*He sits down and buries his face in his hands*]. And if the letter hadn't come I should have gone on being fooled to the end. You had better have told me, Rachel, before we married. I should have done exactly what I did—I should have married you all the same.

[RACHEL moves with an irresistible impulse of love and gratitude towards him].

CARTERET [*stopping her*]. No, you needn't go on with that now. I shouldn't have had those illusions—I shouldn't have had that dream of love and pride in—in the child, but I should not have had this ghastly awakening. Good God! that night that I told you about just now—the night I first heard—I've never told another human being about that night of revelation, of knowing what it meant to have a child—and it was all a lie. It was none of it true. She's not mine—I have no child—she's a child without a name.

RACHEL [*fiercely, in an agony of apprehension*]. No, no! I won't have you say that! She has your name, your splendid name—Will, you're not going to take it from her? You're not going to make her suffer for something she had no part in?

CARTERET. Am I likely to make a child suffer? Do you understand me as little as that—it is not the child who will have to endure —

[*The clock strikes the hour—they look at each other.*

RACHEL. Are you going up to her?

CARTERET [*without looking at her*]. No.

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RACHEL [*hesitatingly*]. I'll go instead. She'll be wondering.

CARTERET. No. You shall not go from here. I must have the truth—all you've kept back—the whole of this damnable story.

RACHEL. I can't, I can't—you terrify me when you look like that. . . .

CARTERET [*regardless*]. I must have it. I must know.

[RACHEL is silent.]

CARTERET [*quietly*]. Do you understand? I must have the truth.

[RACHEL tries to make up her mind to speak.]

CARTERET. Go on.

RACHEL. They were all so unkind to me there—when I was the governess. [She stops.]

CARTERET. Go on; that's not what I want to hear.

RACHEL. Jack—[She stops]. Oh, I can't!

CARTERET. Do you understand that you are not going from here till you have told me?

RACHEL [*looking wildly round her*]. Oh, when you look like that I feel I have no one!

[She buries her face in her hands.]

CARTERET. Go on. Let me hear.

[RACHEL waits. He takes down her hands. She looks up at him, then makes up her mind and begins again.]

RACHEL. He was the only one who was kind—and—and—

CARTERET [*sternly*]. And—what?

RACHEL. He made love to me.

CARTERET. You let him . . . make love to you?

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RACHEL [*hardly audibly*]. Yes.

CARTERET. The scoundrel!

RACHEL. Now then, you know it all.

CARTERET. No, not all. Were you going away with him that night?

RACHEL. Yes—he said we must be married. I knew we must—

CARTERET [*bitterly*]. Yes, you had to marry someone. . . . [RACHEL looks at him imploringly]. Go on to the end.

RACHEL [*with an effort*]. He was going to East Africa. He was to sail next day, and I was going with him. We were going up by the late train to be married in the morning, and we meant to leave the car at the station with a letter to his parents—and then the car broke down by the roadside—and you came, and the next day he sailed . . . Now you know it all.

CARTERET. Yes, that sounds like the truth at last. I know that I have dragged the truth from you bit by bit. My God! I was far enough from it that night when I thought I was protecting an innocent little girl who was being bullied by her employer. You called me simple just now—I was simple indeed.

RACHEL. Yes, you were simple and trusting and wonderful—you say you would have married me all the same if I had dared to tell you. I know you would. It would have been like you—like your greatness and goodness. But, oh, how could I tell you—how could I! Oh, Will, you say you could have forgiven me then—can't you forgive me now?

CARTERET. Forgiveness! What does forgiveness matter, if there's no belief when trust has gone? Rachel, I believed in you as I believe in my Redeemer. You knew I did. What was in your thoughts, this very evening was it, or was it another lifetime? when I

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told you how I trusted and reverenced you? Did you feel nothing but mockery at the success of your deceit?

RACHEL. No, no. I thought when you were telling me, what a great pure heart you had, how I would try to be worthy of you.

CARTERET [*with a bitter laugh*]. Worthy of me! by letting me believe every day of our lives something that was false, false; something that had never been. Oh, I can't bear it.

RACHEL [*suddenly with a wild impulse*]. Oh, don't let Mary know!

CARTERET. Don't speak her name. I can't endure it yet.

RACHEL. Don't let her suffer! Oh, don't let suffering come to her, let me have it all.

CARTERET. You have it all? Is that what you think? Suffering is round us all everywhere like the darkness.

[*He sits on sofa, covering his face with his hands.*

RACHEL [*looking round her as if terrified*]. The darkness! Will, I'm so frightened—you have been my shelter, my rock, my love. Help me now! Help me! I cannot do without you!

[*She stands looking at him, waiting for him to speak.*

CARTERET [*without looking at her*]. You need not be so frightened. I will always shelter you—you—and your child. . . .

[*RACHEL stands for a moment as if transfixed, then speaks*].

RACHEL. I am going up to say good-night to her—she will be lying awake.

CARTERET [*as she slowly turns away, put out his hand, the other still covering his face*]. Poor little Rachel!

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[*She takes his hand, timidly—they clasp hands, and loose them again. It is not a lovers' embrace: it is a compact between them*]

CURTAIN comes down as RACHEL goes out.

CARTERET still sitting with his face hid in his hands,
broken with emotion.

KIRSTIN.

KIRSTIN.

A Dramatic Sketch in Three Scenes.

SCENE 1.

Characters in the order of their appearance:

HENRY MERTON (*a young Englishman*).:

PETER THWAITE (*a Sheep Farmer in Australia*).

KIRSTIN (*THWAITE'S Daughter*).

MRS PLANT (*Housekeeper to MERTON*).

LADY GAIRLOCH.

LADY BETTY CRAIGIE (*her Daughter*).

JANE (*a maid*).

THE ACTION takes place:—

In SCENE I., at a remote sheep farm in Queensland at the end of the 19th Century.

SCENE 2, at DR MERTON'S House in Devonshire Street.

SCENE 3, the same.

Between SCENES 1 and 2, fifteen years elapse.

Between SCENES 2 and 3, a night.

SCENE I. : Outside THWAITE'S sheep farm in Australia.

A double wooden railing at back runs the whole length of stage, supposed to be continued behind house—L. part of the house is seen—wooden house with veranda. THWAITE leaning against railing smoking a pipe C. MERTON R.C. on wooden seat, wooden table beside him C. He is arranging, strapping, etc., a wallet or satchel.

KIRSTIN.

MERTON. There now, I think everything's ready. There's one strap more somewhere [*looking round*] I must have left it in the house. And then I shall have to say good-bye. How can I thank you, Mr Thwaite, for all you have done for me! [THWAITE, *unsmiling, smokes on in silence*]. The way you took me in when you found me dying and let me stay under your roof all these weeks—

THWAITE [*gruffly*]. That's all right.

MERTON. You have been endlessly good to me. I shall never forget it, never.

THWAITE. Never's a long time.

MERTON. But I mean it, I assure you.

THWAITE. Oh, yes, I daresay, you mean it—yes.

MERTON. Good Lord! What an escape! I can't think how it was I didn't die, when my horse pitched me off on to my head and left me senseless. I should have died if you hadn't found me, and no one would have been the wiser.

THWAITE. There's plenty dies over here and no one the wiser.

MERTON. I daresay.

THWAITE. There's plenty of others that's alive.

MERTON. I wonder you troubled to keep another in the world then, Mr Thwaite.

THWAITE. It was the gal. She would have it we ought to pick you up, but I was in a hurry with some sheep in the eart going to Banooga.

MERTON. And they mattered more, of course.

THWAITE. Well, they was alive, you see.

MERTON. To be sure—yes.

THWAITE. And you didn't seem to be. But the gal, she thought you were. So I said, 'Well, if there's room for him and the sheep too, I'll take him along—But what'll we do with him next?' 'Well,' she says,

KIRSTIN.

'I'll look after him.' And I says, 'You've your work to do, remember.' You can understand, Mr Merton, that if a man has a sheep farm in this country, that's his job. His sheep must come first. You don't want no dead men along.

MERTON. Oh, I quite see that. And no live ones either if they are in the way.

THWAITE. That's about it.

MERTON. I must have been most awfully inconvenient.

THWAITE. Well, it was just the lambing time, and KIRSTIN had to look after the ewes. Lucky it were a healthy season.

MERTON [smiling]. And she managed to look after me as well as the ewes.

THWAITE. She knows she's got to get her work done.

MERTON. She seems able to do it.

THWAITE. She knows her job. I've kept her at it since she was a little wench.

MERTON. It's wonderful, all she can do.

THWAITE [scornfully]. Wonderful? What's there wonderful in it, a strong, healthy gal like that? I'd be ashamed if she didn't know what a farmer's daughter's got to know—about dipping the sheep, washing 'em, and shearing, and breaking a horse, and riding him bareback round the boundary. She'd need to be ashamed if she couldn't. And she can use her eyes and her ears. There's nothing she can't see or hear, that gal. Oh, any woman can learn to work if you just make her.

MERTON. Any woman? . . . that kind of work? [smiling and shaking his head.]

THWAITE. I daresay women isn't much use where you come from.

MERTON. I come from London.

KIRSTIN.

THWAITE [*with a pitying smile*]. London. . . ah!

MERTON. I shall think of your life out here, Mr Thwaite, when I'm back in London.

THWAITE. No, no, you won't, young man. Nothing of the kind. You won't be thinking of us, no more than we shall be thinking of you. I shall be thinking of my sheep, and you—well, whatever folks do think of in London.

MERTON. A good many things.

THWAITE [*indifferently and rather incredulously*]. Do they?

MERTON. I shall have to think a great deal about my job. I'm going to be a doctor, and it's uphill work at first. But my uncle is a successful doctor, and that will be a help.

THWAITE. Ah, you mean he's done the work for you.

MERTON [*smiling*]. Some of it perhaps.

THWAITE. I've not much use for doctors. Never had one inside my door.

MERTON. They seem to be needed in London, luckily for me.

THWAITE. Never been there.

MERTON. But you are an Englishman, aren't you?

THWAITE [*sombrely*]. Yes, I'm an Englishman. My father was a Yorkshire farmer; my mother was a Scotch woman. I quarrelled with him and ran away from home and I went to Liverpool. And the captain of a steamer going to Sydney took me on as cabin boy, and on board there was an Australian sheep farmer. And he brought me to his sheep run—and afterwards I married his daughter, and he died, and I went on with the sheep farming. That's my tale.

MERTON. And you never saw your parents again?

KIRSTIN.

THWAITE. I never went back. I never knew my mother. She died when I was born. Kirstin, she never knew her mother neither.

MERTON. That's a bad loss.

THWAITE [*smokes reflectively*]. Mebbe, mebbe. But she's no need of a mother. I've learned her what she'd need to know, and though I says it, she's been brought up by an honest man to earn an honest living in honest ways. And that's enough for anyone.

MERTON. It's a great deal. But is it enough for her? Doesn't she want any more?

THWAITE. I don't know—but if she did, want 'd be her master. [*Passes his hand along the railing*]. There's that fence going again. I believe the wood's rotting. Kirstin! [*KIRSTIN comes out of the house with a strap in her hand*]. Look at this place in the fence—it's rotting. That's bad.

KIRSTIN [*looking at it*]. Yes, I know. There's some more going the same way, further up.

THWAITE. Well, you'd better go round and see where the places are; it'll have to be looked to.

KIRSTIN. Yes, father; I'll see to it.

[THWAITE goes on looking at the fence and passing his hand along it. KIRSTIN gives the strap to MERTON.

KIRSTIN. Here's a strap you left in the house, Mr Merton.

MERTON. Oh, thank you so much. [*Tries to put strap round bag*]. I'm afraid it's about time for me to be off.

KIRSTIN. Yes, I suppose it is. I've saddled your mare for you; she's ready.

MERTON. Have you done that besides everything else? I'm not going to try to thank you for it all—

THWAITE. No, I wouldn't. If the mare is saddled, you'd best be mounting, you've got a long way to go.

KIRSTIN.

KIRSTIN [looking at him struggling with the strap]. You want another hole there. Here, let me. [Taking the strap and pulling out a knife].

THWAITE [looking impatiently at KIRSTIN]. Well, I'll be stepping, Mr Merton. I'm rather busy to-day.

MERTON [smiling]. I'm so sorry, Mr Thwaite—this is the last time I shall interrupt the farm work.

KIRSTIN [repeats half to herself]. The last time—yes.

THWAITE. I'll be going on. Kirstin, you follow me down there away—when you're ready [rather sarcastically].

KIRSTIN. Yes, father. [Still doing strap].

MERTON [shaking hands with THWAITE]. Good-bye, then, Mr Thwaite. And —

THWAITE [interrupting him]. Now don't start thanking me again! Good-bye, and don't break your neck this time.

[THWAITE goes out]. [KIRSTIN finishes the strap and hands it to MERTON].

MERTON. You must let me thank you, Kirstin.

KIRSTIN [looking up at him and smiling]. Must I?

MERTON. And then I shall have to say good-bye to you, too.

KIRSTIN [forcing herself to be calm]. Yes, it's good-byes, to-day.

MERTON. It's no use saying it over and over again, but I do want you to believe how grateful I am to you for saving my life.

KIRSTIN. You needn't to thank me. I was glad I did.

MERTON [half to himself, looking round]. It's so queer when you're leaving a place. It looks different, somehow.

KIRSTIN.

KIRSTIN. Does it?

MERTON. Don't you know what I mean?

KIRSTIN. No, I've never left a place. I've always been here.

MERTON. Isn't it extraordinary!

KIRSTIN. What?

MERTON. Why, to find you and your father here miles away from anyone, leading this life.

KIRSTIN. Why is it extraordinary? We've always done it.

MERTON. That's just it. You've never done anything else.

KIRSTIN. Of course not.

MERTON. And you do the same thing day after day.

KIRSTIN. The same thing? No. There's the feeding to look after in the winter, and the lambing in the spring, and the shearing in the summer —

MERTON. Yes, the summer in January.

KIRSTIN. January—when else should it be?

MERTON. Our summer's in July.

KIRSTIN [*interested*]. Is it? I didn't know that.

MERTON. Didn't you, Kirstin? And our spring is in March and April.

KIRSTIN. March and April? Those are our beautiful autumn months. Oh, how odd. When do your lambs come, then?

MERTON. In February and March.

KIRSTIN. Oh, how strange!

MERTON. Kirstin, did you never go to school?

KIRSTIN. To school? No, how could I? Father couldn't have spared me.

MERTON. Not even when you were little?

KIRSTIN. I don't believe anyhow there was a school near enough. Father learned me to read, and I write a bit too, but not very well. [*Smiling*]. I've

KIRSTIN.

always worked with the sheep ever since I can remember. When I was little I used to drive them in and see if any were missing.

MERTON. Could you count them?

KIRSTIN [surprised]. Oh, no; but I knew them all one from another and could tell which was gone.

MERTON. Could you? Can you do that now?

KIRSTIN. Well, of course. Anyone could.

MERTON. Anyone? Do you really believe that?

KIRSTIN. Yes, anyone living out here, like us.

MERTON. Ah, you know things we don't know in London.

KIRSTIN. Do I? But then [*quite simply as though asking the question*] perhaps you know things in London that we don't know out here?

MERTON [smiling]. Perhaps we do. . . . I shall think of you when I'm back in my London home.

[*All through this scene MERTON is not in the least sentimental—he is obviously not sorry to be turning his face homewards*].

KIRSTIN. Shall you? I'm glad of that.

MERTON. And wonder what you're doing.

KIRSTIN. You needn't to wonder that—I've told you what we'll be doing all the year round.

MERTON. And is it enough for you, Kirstin?

KIRSTIN. Enough! It fills up all the time, I can tell you.

MERTON. Are you content?

KIRSTIN. Content? I've never thought about it. Oh, yes, I suppose I am. I've always been content up to now.

MERTON [cheerfully]. Then there's no reason why you should leave off.

KIRSTIN. Daresay not.

MERTON. But when you read stories about other

KIRSTIN.

kinds of lives, doesn't it make you want to see something else?

KIRSTIN. I'm not much of a reader. Father has some books put away but I don't care about it.

MERTON. Doesn't he ever read a newspaper even?

KIRSTIN. There's none comes here.

MERTON [*laughing*]. Well, I didn't think such people existed. This place will seem a dream to me when I get back.

KIRSTIN. A dream, will it?

MERTON. Yes, you and your life here, and looking out and seeing wide pastures, and the palm trees, and the eucalyptus instead of seeing plane trees dropping their leaves on the London pavements. Oh! to see a wet plane leaf shining in the lights of London! There's no place like it after all. And now I'm going back to it.

KIRSTIN. You like London best then?

MERTON. Well, all Londoners do. I'm a Londoner, you see—I was born and bred there, just as you were born and bred here.

KIRSTIN. Of course, yes. Mr Merton, you said you'd think of us when you was away. I'd like to think of you too, and what you was doing in London, if you could tell me what it's like.

MERTON [*smiling*]. Well, it's rather difficult to tell you—it's all so very different. For one thing, when I look out of my window in London, I see the wall of somebody else's house, instead of a wide expanse like this.

KIRSTIN. Oh, is there a house as near as that?

MERTON. A house? Dozens.

KIRSTIN. Dozens of houses close to yours?

MERTON. Scores! Hundreds! Thousands! of houses wherever you go, wherever you look.

KIRSTIN.

KIRSTIN. Oh, is that really true?

MERTON. Of course it is.

KIRSTIN. But how do you know them apart?

MERTON. They have numbers on them—a number painted on every house.

KIRSTIN. Oh! painted on every house—like a brand! It must be very difficult to count up to so many thousands.

MERTON. Oh, no; they begin at *one* again in each street.

KIRSTIN. How many houses are there in a street?

MERTON. That depends. Sometimes there are fifty, sometimes two hundred and more. My house is 147.

KIRSTIN. 147. I shall remember that.

MERTON. But the number won't be enough. You must remember the street too. The street I live in is called Devonshire Street—so that if you want to know where to find me, it's 147 Devonshire Street.

KIRSTIN. 147 Devonshire Street—I shall remember that.

MERTON. I'll write it down for you [*takes out his pocket-book, tears out a sheet and writes on it.*]

KIRSTIN. Write it very clear, won't you, so as I can read it.

MERTON. Yes, I'll write it very clear. There now, you can't mistake it—Henry Merton, 147 Devonshire Street, London. So when you come to London, Kirstin, don't forget. Look, I shall write that down too—to remind you! [*writing*] *Come to London, Kirstin, don't forget.*

KIRSTIN [*looking at it*]. Yes, that's very clear. I can read that. [*Reads*] ‘Henry Merton, 147 Devonshire Street. Come to London, Kirstin, don't forget.’ I shan't forget, but I shan't come to London.

KIRSTIN.

MERTON. Who knows? Perhaps by the time you come, I shall have got on in the world.

KIRSTIN. What does that mean?

MERTON. Oh, Kirstin, you are too delightful! It means . . . well . . . it means—it's rather difficult to explain.

KIRSTIN. Does it mean being better than other people?

MERTON. Um—not altogether! Something of the kind perhaps. It means getting on in the thing you're doing. I'm going to try to be a successful doctor.

KIRSTIN. Does a successful doctor cure everybody?

MERTON. Not always. But a great many people come to him to be cured and give him money whether he cures them or not.

KIRSTIN. Do they? Then you'll have a great deal of money.

MERTON. I hope so—I want it most dreadfully.

KIRSTIN [surprised]. Do you?

MERTON. I have hardly any—that's one of my difficulties.

KIRSTIN. What a pity.

MERTON. Oh, well, it'll come all right, I dare-say, when I'm back in London and can start work.

KIRSTIN [looking at paper]. When you're back at 147 Devonshire Street —

[Enter THWAITE. KIRSTIN puts the paper back in her pocket].

THWAITE. Kirstin, the black ewe's missing.

KIRSTIN [quietly]. What, again? I'll go and seek her.

THWAITE. You had better. Well, Mr Merton, I suppose you'll just be about starting? [Evidently waiting for MERTON to leave].

KIRSTIN.

MERTON [*laughing*]. So sorry I'm still here, Mr Thwaite. I'm really going now. I've been telling Kirstin what London is like.

THWAITE. She won't find that very useful, I expect. The boy's got your mare at the door. I'll come and see you off.

MERTON. Thank you very much.

THWAITE [*exasperated*]. Ah!

MERTON [*turning back to KIRSTIN*]. Good-bye, Kirstin. Once more, thank you. [KIRSTIN looks up at him with a little smile].

KIRSTIN [*in a low voice*]. Oh, that's all right.

MERTON goes out, followed by THWAITE. KIRSTIN remains alone. She stands quite still for a moment, her left hand on the fence, looking in the direction they have gone in. She leans forward and gives a little wave of her hand, then turns round facing the audience, and leaning with her back to the railing, her two hands on it behind her. THWAITE comes back.

THWAITE. Well, now we shall get some work done. What are you standing gaping there for? Where's that ewe?

KIRSTIN. I'll go and find her.

CURTAIN comes down slowly as she goes out R.
THWAITE looking at railing and feeling it to see where it is giving.

SCENE II.

Fifteen years have elapsed.

SCENE : DR MERTON's rooms in Devonshire Street —a room with a deep bay window at back. Room empty as curtain goes up. Enter MERTON, with hat on. He takes it off and throws it down, flings himself into a chair by table.

KIRSTIN.

MERTON. Oh, dear, I'm tired! [Sees a letter lying on table, opens it, smiles] 'Next week' . . . [sits reflecting a moment, evidently with pleasure, hands behind his head, then takes up letter again and reads it. Begins writing as though answering the letter to which he refers, then rings handbell on table.]

[Enter MRS PLANT]. [She stands waiting].

MERTON. Oh, Mrs Plant. I want to speak to you about one or two things.

MRS PLANT. Yes, sir? [she waits]. It wasn't about the soup being cold, sir? For it was, there's no denying it. But then you *did* keep your dinner waiting to-night.

MERTON. Yes, the soup was cold as a matter of fact—and I did keep dinner waiting—but that's not what I have to say.

MRS PLANT. It does seem too much really for you to come in so late, sir, and then have to go out again after dinner. Your uncle, Dr. John, he never liked doing that.

MERTON. I don't like it either. But that's what a doctor's life is like—to be sent for at all sorts of hours. It would be worse, you know, if I were never sent for at all.

MRS PLANT. Yes, sir; but it would be less trouble for you, sir.

MERTON. And less money. I could hardly keep up this house if I had no patients.

MRS PLANT. No, sir. Oh, I quite see that you have to put up with them.

MERTON. I rang for you to say first that I shall be going into Surrey to-morrow for the day probably.

MRS PLANT. Yes, sir.

MERTON [evidently hesitating]. And next week I'm going to Scotland.

KIRSTIN.

MRS PLANT. Are you, sir? You don't often go away so early in the year.

MERTON. I am going to stay at Castle Gairloch.

MRS PLANT [*impressed*]. Indeed, sir—with the Countess? Oh! *indeed*. You would see a letter that the Countess sent round by hand just after you went out.

MERTON. Yes, I've seen it. It's about the journey. It's rather a difficult place to get to, it seems.

MRS PLANT. Indeed, sir.

MERTON. And I also wanted to say to you that I am thinking of making a change in my arrangements—[*he hesitates*].

MRS PLANT. A change, sir?

MERTON [*hesitates*]. I was going to tell you—the fact is I am thinking of marrying.

MRS PLANT. Marrying, sir?

MERTON. Why not?

MRS PLANT. No reason at all, sir—on the contrary—but I thought perhaps you was too comfortable to marry, so to speak. Of course, Dr John, he always said he thought it better for doctors to marry, though he didn't carry it out himself, as it were.

MERTON [*rather impatiently*]. Well, it's *my* marrying I'm talking about—and I'll tell you when I come back from Scotland who it is.

MRS PLANT. Thank you, sir. The Countess's daughter is a very nice young lady, isn't she—Lady Betty?

MERTON [*looking at her with a smile*]. Very.

MRS PLANT. Of course, sir, her ladyship—I mean the lady you are going to marry—will want to make changes in the household?

MERTON. Of course. But we needn't discuss that now.

KIRSTIN.

MRS PLANT. No, sir. To tell the truth, sir, I shouldn't be sorry to have another maid instead of Jane. Jane's so excitable at times—she's quite a trouble.

MERTON. Pray, Mrs Plant [stopping her] I cannot discuss that now.

MRS PLANT. Just as you like, sir. Dr John, he always liked to look forward, as it were.

[*A knock heard at outside door*].

MERTON. Was that a knock?

[*They listen*].

MRS PLANT. I hope it's not one of those poor people patients—they're the worst. At nearly ten o'clock at night, it's really a shame.

[*Knock heard again*].

MRS PLANT. Am I to let anyone in, sir?

MERTON [*hesitating*]. I'd rather not, unless it's someone who is really ill. Go and see who it is.

[MRS PLANT goes out R. to answer door. MERTON goes on writing his letter at the writing table. After a moment MRS PLANT comes in and closes door.

MRS PLANT. It's a person, sir. She wants to see you very particular.

MERTON. Is she ill?

MRS PLANT. No, sir, she says she isn't—but she looks very strange.

MERTON. Strange?

MRS PLANT. She says you know her, sir.

MERTON. She's some sort of impostor, I suppose. You shouldn't have let her in. Bring her in, then, and I'll send her away.

[Enter KIRSTIN, a knapsack or satchel slung round her. A smaller packet, a roll with oilskin round it, hangs by her side].

MERTON. Now, my good woman, what do you

KIRSTIN.

want? Its rather late, you know, to consult a doctor.

[*She looks at him*].

KIRSTIN. I've not come to consult you, Mr Merton. [*He looks at her bewildered*]. Don't you know me again? [*She smiles*]. [*He looks at her trying to remember*]. Don't you remember me in Australia?

MERTON. Australia! You are Kirstin—Kirstin Thwaite!

KIRSTIN. Yes, I'm Kirstin.

MERTON. Kirstin! . . . [*he holds out his hand*] I'm—I'm—very glad to see you.

KIRSTIN. Do you remember you said 'Come to London, Kirstin.' You wrote it down, and where you lived.

MERTON. Yes—I did.

KIRSTIN. And I never thought I'd come. But now I have. I can hardly believe it.

MERTON. It is unbelievable.

KIRSTIN. My father died five years ago, and I was left alone and I've run the farm ever since. Then I thought I'd come.

MERTON. But how did you get here?

KIRSTIN. It was a business. I rode sixty miles from Banooga to the railroad, and then I got into the train and went to Brisbane and then on to a ship to London. Oh, we was such a long time on the sea. And then after I got off the ship in the river I asked the way here and I walked.

MERTON. Walked!

KIRSTIN. Yes, it took me a good bit of time. I believe I've been wandering round and round. There's so many people and things everywhere that I was sort of mazed. At home I'd know my way by the stars [*she smiles*] but here they don't seem no use to me.

KIRSTIN.

MERTON. And you had those things to carry.

KIRSTIN. Oh, that's nothing. I'm strong, you know.

MERTON. Well, now you must sit down. You must be very tired. [*She is going to sit on a small chair*]. No. [*He motions her to an armchair*]. That's more comfortable. [*He draws forward the armchair*].

KIRSTIN. Oh, I don't mind for that—I'm used to a wooden settle at home, you remember.

MERTON. Yes, I remember. [*With a sudden thought*]. When did you have anything to eat?

KIRSTIN. Just before I left the ship, about two o'clock.

MERTON. Good heavens, you must be starving. [*Puts out his hand to the bell, then pauses*].

KIRSTIN [*smiling*]. Not as bad as that. I'm used to being out for long stretches.

MERTON. You shall have something at once.

KIRSTIN. Thank you. I won't say no. Oh, I'm so glad I've got here! I thought I never should.

[*MERTON puts out his hand to the bell again—then hesitates*].

MERTON. Kirstin, where are you . . . [*stops—hesitates*]. What are you going to do next?

KIRSTIN [*surprised*]. To do next?

MERTON [*nervously*]. I mean—What were you thinking of doing?

KIRSTIN. I thought I'd live here with you.

MERTON. Oh—yes . . .

KIRSTIN. You see, I have no one to please but myself now that father's gone. He died five years ago, and I worked hard ever since and made money, and saved up. I sold my sheep, and when you was with us you told me you weren't rich, and wanted more money, so I thought I'd come to London and bring you some.

KIRSTIN.

MERTON [staggered]. Bring me—some?

KIRSTIN. Yes, I've brought you £10,000.

MERTON. £10,000!

KIRSTIN. Yes, it's in here [lifting bundle from round her neck and putting it on table]—all in £10 notes. I tied them up in bundles myself. And I've never left it off me till this minute, night or day. A rough fellow nearly got it away from me on the road to the railway, but I soon sent him about his business. [Taps her pocket and shows end of revolver].

MERTON [gasps—tries to recover himself]. It's very good of you, Kirstin, to bring it to me, but—but—I can't take that money, you know. I really can't.

KIRSTIN. You can't take it! But you must—it's for you—that's why I worked for it all the time—for you to have it and be rich. I've got plenty for myself. I don't want it—I've got a lot sewn into my belt.

MERTON. But it's impossible! Don't you understand?

KIRSTIN. Impossible? Why?

MERTON. Things are different here.

KIRSTIN. But people like having money, don't they?

MERTON. Of course they do—but I can't take *that*. But I'll explain it to you in the morning. Now [passing his hand over his forehead] I'm—you're—too tired. I'll tell my housekeeper to take you up to a bedroom and give you something to eat. [Rings].

KIRSTIN [after he has rung]. Can't you explain now? I'm not tired really. I'm never tired, and nothing matters now that I've got here. Oh, I was so afraid I shouldn't!

[Enter MRS PLANT].

KIRSTIN.

MERTON [*nervously*]. Mrs Plant, will you get the spare room ready, please.

MRS PLANT. The spare room, sir? to-night?

MERTON. Yes, for Miss Thwaite, whom I knew in Australia. She . . . has come to visit me.

MRS PLANT. The spare room's ready, all but the sheets. [*Coldly*].

MERTON. And bring her something to eat.

MRS PLANT. To eat? What would you like brought, sir?

KIRSTIN. Oh, I don't mind what it is.

MRS PLANT [*still addressing MERTON*]. I could bring some tea and bread and butter, if that would do.

MERTON [*to KIRSTIN*]. Wouldn't you like something more solid?

KIRSTIN. Oh, no, thank you. That will do quite well.

[*A pause*].

MERTON. Perhaps, Kirstin, you'd like to go now with Mrs Plant, and she will show you your room and take you some tea there.

KIRSTIN [*surprised and embarrassed*]. Yes—if you'd like me to go now. [*She stretches out her hand towards the bundle*].

MERTON. It's rather a risk to leave that about. Hadn't Mrs Plant better lock it up in the safe? [*He is about to hand it to MRS PLANT*].

KIRSTIN [*snatching it hastily*]. No, no—I'll keep it for the night, thank you.

MRS PLANT [*stiffly*]. Just as you like.

KIRSTIN [*to MERTON*]. I shall see you in the morning, shan't I?

MERTON. Yes, of course. [*MRS PLANT is standing at the door, waiting for KIRSTIN to go out*]. Good-night then, dear Kirstin. Mrs Plant will see that you have everything that you want.

KIRSTIN.

KIRSTIN. Thank you. [MRS PLANT is entirely unresponsive]. [Then to MERTON as she goes out] I can't hardly believe that I'm here.

MERTON [trying to be cordial]. It is wonderful, isn't it?

KIRSTIN. Good-night.

MRS PLANT [coldly]. This way, please.

[She goes out, followed by KIRSTIN. MERTON alone walks up and down].

MERTON. Good God !

[He sits down in the chair, covers his face with his hands. He takes up LADY GAIRLOCH's letter and looks at it—then takes up his pen to go on with his letter—throws it down].

CURTAIN.

SCENE III.

SCENE : *The same, next morning.*

[MERTON looking worried and anxious comes hastily into the room and takes up his letters that are lying in a pile, evidently having come by the morning post. He looks through them as he stands. Enter MRS PLANT].

MRS PLANT [stands silent for a moment; he looks up, then goes on with his letters]. Might I speak to you for a moment, sir?

MERTON [irritably]. I'm sorry, Mrs Plant—not now—I haven't a moment.

KIRSTIN.

MRS PLANT. It's only that I don't know what to do for the best. [MERTON has sat down and is cutting open his letters, throwing things into waste-paper basket, etc]. It if were only for one night it wouldn't matter so much.

MERTON. One night! What do you mean?

MRS PLANT. It's about the spare room, sir. At least—at least—Jane's in such a state.

MERTON. I can't discuss Jane now.

MRS PLANT. She's been so dreadfully frightened because she went into the room and that—person—pointed a revolver at her. [MERTON looks up quickly, perturbed]. And now she is shrieking and carrying on so that I am afraid people will hear her in the street.

MERTON [dashing his letters down]. Shrieking? What hysterical fools women are. Where is she?

MRS PLANT. In the basement, sir.

[MERTON goes out hastily and angrily. MRS PLANT alone, listens. Shakes her head. A ring at the door. MRS PLANT goes out to open, leaving door open. Then comes in again.]

[MRS PLANT shows in LADY GAIRLOCH and her daughter].

LADY GAIRLOCH [smiling, to MRS PLANT]. We've come very early, I fear. Will you tell Dr Merton that we are leaving for Scotland to-day instead of to-morrow, and we have come in on our way to King's Cross as I wanted to explain something to him about his journey when he comes to us next week? Is he very busy? I won't keep him a moment.

MRS PLANT. He will be here directly, my lady. He's just speaking to someone.

LADY GAIRLOCH. Oh, don't disturb him. We have a few minutes to spare. We are a little earlier than I thought.

KIRSTIN.

MRS PLANT. Thank you, my lady. [She goes out].

LADY GAIRLOCH. Betty! . . . I'm rather agitated—I can't help it.

BETTY [smiling]. About our coming so early?

LADY GAIRLOCH. About the whole thing.

BETTY. Dear mother, you needn't be.

LADY GAIRLOCH. I wonder if we know him well enough.

BETTY. Surely we saw enough of him during Mary's illness to know him very well indeed, and after all, since he saved my sister's life I ought to be grateful to him, and perhaps something more. [Smiling].

LADY GAIRLOCH. Yes, I suppose he did save her life—at any rate she got well when he was attending her.

BETTY. Oh, mother, of course he saved it. And how delightful he was all through that anxious time.

LADY GAIRLOCH. Are you quite sure of yourself?

BETTY. Absolutely.

LADY GAIRLOCH. Because I do feel that by asking him to stay at Gairloch we are giving him an answer.

BETTY [smiling happily]. Yes, before he has definitely asked the question!

LADY GAIRLOCH. I think he has been afraid of what the answer would be.

BETTY [smiling]. He need have no fear.

LADY GAIRLOCH [with a smile and a sigh]. Well, no one will be able to say it's a brilliant marriage, or a worldly marriage.

BETTY. I'm not a worldly person. Nor is he, I am sure. There is nothing small or mean about him.

LADY GAIRLOCH. I wonder what your father would have said to it.

BETTY. I believe my dear father would have

KIRSTIN.

wanted me to be happy whatever kind of marriage it was. Come, darling mother, don't have any more misgivings. I feel as certain of myself as—that the sun is shining in at that window !

[*LADY GAIRLOCH smiles and kisses her. They go towards the window at the back, into which the sun is shining.*].

BETTY. Even the view from Devonshire Street looks passable on such a morning as this !

[*As they are standing at the back window looking out, so that the door in front room is hidden from them,*

MERTON bursts in, followed by JANE].

JANE [*violently*]. I've always been used to be respectable, sir, and I won't stay, not another hour, in the house with that female as you brought in to sleep last night. And then her trying to shoot me dead when I went into the room ! I leave your service to-night, sir, and I won't stay where there are such goings on.

MERTON [*furious*]. Look here, if you want to go, go to the devil ! and be damned ! Not another word will I hear. [*He pushes her out and shuts the door, turns back into the room*]. Damn it all ! What shall I do ?

[*LADY GAIRLOCH and her daughter look at one another, horrified. They come forward. MERTON starts on seeing them, and stands rooted to the ground. He recovers himself and speaks in his usual tones*].

MERTON. Lady Gairloch ! I didn't know you were here. I ought to have been told. I am so sorry to have kept you waiting. [*He shakes hands with her, and then with BETTY*]. Won't you sit down ?

LADY GAIRLOCH. Oh, thank you, we really have hardly a moment [*they remain standing, embarrassed*]. We came in on our way to King's Cross to

KIRSTIN.

tell you about the cross-country journey to Gairloch. Your housekeeper said you were speaking to somebody and that you would be here directly. So I told her not to disturb you. [A pause].

MERTON. I'm afraid you must have heard that very unpleasant scene I had with one of my maids.

LADY GAIRLOCH [*not quite knowing what to say*]. We couldn't help hearing.

MERTON. She's a hysterical sort of girl.

LADY GAIRLOCH. Oh, is she?

MERTON [*attempting to speak lightly*]. It's rather difficult sometimes for a bachelor to deal with his household.

[*Looks smiling at LADY GAIRLOCH, who also smiles, but looks uncomfortable. He is standing with his back to the door. It opens slowly while he is speaking and KIRSTIN stands in the doorway. DR MERTON sees LADY GAIRLOCH looking at the door. He turns round and sees KIRSTIN. She comes forward a step and looks at MERTON with an appealing smile*].

MERTON. Oh, Kirstin—[then he turns to LADY GAIRLOCH]—This is Miss Thwaite who came last night. Kirstin, I am sorry, I'm very much engaged just now, would you mind going to your room again till I call you? [Goes and opens the door. KIRSTIN goes out silently, looking at him as she goes. He comes back into the room—an embarrassed silence]

LADY GAIRLOCH. Miss Thwaite, did you say?

MERTON [*hesitating*]. Yes, I knew her in Australia. She arrived in England yesterday, and she came here for the night.

LADY GAIRLOCH [*coldly*]. I see.

BETTY [*to help him out*]. From Australia? A long way.

MERTON. Very—she comes from the wilds, you

KIRSTIN.

know. [Talking as though to cover his embarrassment]. She's quite uncivilised, really.

BETTY. Is she quite in her right mind? She looked so strange.

MERTON [catching at suggestion]. No, I don't think she is quite right—that's the difficulty.

LADY GAIRLOCH. It must be a grave responsibility for you.

MERTON. It really is. To tell the truth I was utterly taken aback when she appeared—I was rather horrified, in fact. [Making up his mind]. It's rather a long story—[Enter KIRSTIN].

MERTON. Kirstin . . . [she stops him].

KIRSTIN. You needn't to send me away again. I'm going off myself. But first I want to tell you that I've heard what you was saying. I didn't know where to go as your housekeeper was upstairs—and so I just waited in the passage and I couldn't help hearing what you said. I have terrible good ears, as you know, and I heard you tell these two ladies that I'm not in my right mind. I suppose that means I'm mad. [To LADY GAIRLOCH]. I want to tell you that I'm not mad.

[LADY BETTY, evidently alarmed, draws nearer to her mother. LADY GAIRLOCH not quite sure].

LADY GAIRLOCH. I am afraid, Dr Merton, we must not wait any longer.

KIRSTIN. Will you wait for one moment while I tell you the truth, instead of what you've been told? I am in my right mind, and it's a lie to say I am not—even if you do think I look so. I want to tell you why I came here. I came because he asked me.

[LADY GAIRLOCH starts, and looks at MERTON for corroboration].

Fifteen years ago he was nearly killed in Australia.

KIRSTIN.

My father and I found him lying by the roadside and picked him up for dead. We took him home and kept him and looked after him. When we had made him well and he went away back to England, he told me I was to come and see him in London, at his house. I am a rough woman and know nothing of fine folks' ways, and I didn't know but they spoke the truth like us. So I came.

[*BETTY draws near to her mother and looks at her as much as to say, 'Can this be true?'*]

KIRSTIN [*answering BETTY's gesture*]. It's all true. Here is the paper he wrote out for me with his name on it, and the street he lived in, and the number of his house and all for me to come. It's got very rubbed out—it was written fifteen years ago, you see. [*Reads aloud from paper*] 'Henry Merton, 147 Devonshire Street, London. Come to London, Kirstin. Don't forget.'

[*She hands the paper to LADY GAIRLOCH, who reads it to herself, BETTY looking over her shoulder*].

LADY GAIRLOCH [*returning paper to KIRSTIN*]. Yes, I see. [A pause].

KIRSTIN. I didn't forget. He did.

LADY GAIRLOCH [*looks at watch*]. Come, Betty, it is more than time for us to go. [*They go towards door*].

MERTON. Lady Gairloch, I should like to explain—

LADY GAIRLOCH. I'm afraid we really mustn't stay now, or we shall miss our train.

MERTON [*at door with them*]. Then . . . you kindly said you would tell me about the cross-country journey?

LADY GAIRLOCH [*after hesitating*]. I will write to you.

MERTON [*in a quick whisper to BETTY as she goes*]

KIRSTIN.

out]. May I tell you the whole story when I come to Scotland?

BETTY [with a shade of constraint in her manner]. I want you to tell me.

KIRSTIN [who has overheard]. Oh! [She looks after them as much as to say, He is going to tell her about me].

[MERTON re-enters room, agitated].

KIRSTIN. Oh, those things you said about me! they're too dreadful to think of.

MERTON. I'm sorry I said them, and I'm sorry you heard them. But what of the things you said about me, before that girl—the girl I want to marry?

KIRSTIN [half to herself]. To marry?

MERTON. Yes, to marry. Why should it surprise you?

KIRSTIN. I never thought of that.

MERTON. You have made her believe all sorts of things about me—that I'm an ungrateful cad, and that I had forgotten all you did for me.

KIRSTIN [simply]. But you had forgotten.

MERTON. I had forgotten till last night that I had written that paper, I must admit—but, after all, it was a sort of joke [she looks at him]. I never for a moment imagined you would come, and you said you wouldn't. . . .

KIRSTIN. Oh, if I hadn't! But I thought you were so different. I thought you'd remember—and be like you were in Australia. Oh, I didn't know you'd be like this and that you would be—oh! *horified* when I came! Oh, if I could forget that! I almost can't believe it now. It's so dreadful—because I had believed something so different—when you was over there with us. I thought there could be no one else like you. I'd never seen such a fine gentleman before, and I thought there was no one else so clever

KIRSTIN.

or so good or so handsome. Though father he was always saying you was just like other folk, neither better nor worse. Oh, all those years that I've lived for you and thought you'd be glad when I came. When my father died and I was left, the first thing I thought was 'At last! Now I can go. Some day I'll go to him.' And you had told me you were poor and hadn't enough money and wanted more—and I made up my mind I'd bring you some. And I worked day after day—I worked that hard, to make money for you—and I made it, and I saved it, and when I had sold my sheep and got enough, I brought it to you and every day and every hour of that fearful long journey I've thought of when I should get here, and how strange it would be—and I should be rather frightened. But then I thought you'd be so glad to see me, and so glad I had brought you so much money. And then I got here . . . and you weren't so very glad. I knew that last night. But I didn't know you were horrified. And you wouldn't take the money I had worked so hard to get. And you say I've spoilt everything—and it's all been for nothing, all these years—worse than nothing.

MERTON. Kirstin! What can I say . . . I know it looks as if I had been such a rotten beast—but—

KIRSTIN [stopping him]. You needn't to say no more. I'm going away—I'm going back again. I'd best be in the wilds like you said. I can't understand what people are like here.

MERTON. No, no—you can't go away like that—I must know what you are going to do—I must see what we can arrange. [KIRSTIN shakes her head. MERTON perturbed, looks at his watch]. I was going out of London this morning—I ought to be leaving now. [Hesitates, then makes up his mind]. I'll tele-

KIRSTIN.

phone and say I'm prevented. I shan't be five minutes. Wait here for me. [Goes out hastily].

[KIRSTIN alone, looks at the paper again, reads aloud '147 Devonshire Street, London'—looks round her as if taking a last look at the house, puts away the paper, takes from her neck the bale of notes which was still slung round her, and puts it on the table, opens door with precaution, listens, then goes swiftly out. Street door heard shutting].

SLOW CURTAIN.

THE END.

THE PARACHUTE.

THE PARACHUTE.

A Comedy in One Act.

Characters in the order of their appearance:

MRS MAITLAND.

MARY (*her daughter*).

TOM WELBURN.

CANON HARTLEY (*the Rector of the Parish*).

MRS WELBURN.

SCENE : MRS MAITLAND'S *little house*, looking on to a *village green*. MRS MAITLAND knitting at a small table R., a book open beside her. MARY doing nothing, sitting on chair down stage from window L.

MRS MAITLAND. My dear child, what is the matter? You never seem able to settle to anything now.

MARY. The truth is, mamma, I'm bored.

MRS MAITLAND. Bored, when after our long separation during the war you've come home to live with your mother?

MARY. That's just it.

MRS MAITLAND. What's just it?

MARY. I've come home to live with my mother.

MRS MAITLAND. Mary! Do you mean to say you don't like it?

MARY. Not at all.

MRS MAITLAND. Oh, how dreadful this is! Oh, the girls of the present age!

MARY. That's what you're always saying,

THE PARACHUTE.

mamma, but I can't help being of the present day, can I? I'd cheerfully be of another time if I could. [Going to window]. Nothing ever happens here—nothing exciting, and I, who have been a V.A.D. in France during the war, and have conveyed wounded officers by myself to hospitals at midnight [Mrs Maitland holds up her hands in horror] look out of the window for months and see nothing at all. [Goes aimlessly to window—gives a cry].

MRS MAITLAND. What is it?

MARY. Something is happening at last! Look, look, something is coming down from the sky. Oh, what can it be? Yes, it's a parachute and a man hanging to it. He'll come down in the garden; I must render first aid quick.

[Rushes out].

MRS MAITLAND [agitated, goes to window, looks out, starts]. Yes. He has fallen! Oh, dear! Oh, I can't bear that kind of sight. He must be knocked to pieces. [Covers her face with her hands]. Mary has picked him up; she is wonderful.

[Goes to door L. MARY appears at door L, supports WELBURN].

MRS MAITLAND. Oh, Mary, is he dead?

WELBURN [speaking very feebly]. No, no, I think not—thank you very much.

MARY. He is suffering from shock. [In a business-like tone]. Lie down, warmth, and quiet—cover extremities.

WELBURN [feebly]. Yes, quite right—keep me warm and quiet and cover my extremities.

MARY. Now you are not to talk.

WELBURN. Very well, I won't. But I must tell you in case you should ask me—I remember nothing before it happened.

THE PARACHUTE.

MARY. Of course, that's very customary with an accident.

WELBURN [*emphatically*]. It's more than that—I'm so anxious there should be no mistake about it—I've quite lost my memory. I've forgotten who I am—clean forgotten—it's no use your asking me, it would only excite me.

MRS MAITLAND. No, we won't, of course, my dear young man.

WELBURN. I like being called young man. It's a compliment when one's turned forty.

MARY [*alert*]. Oh, you do know that?

WELBURN [*alarmed*]. No, I don't. What did I say?

MARY. You said you were turned forty.

WELBURN. No, no, I couldn't have said that if I don't know who I am. I have no idea.

MRS MAITLAND. It's too sad, really. The poor fellow! He may have a wife and family, and we can't tell them he is here.

WELBURN. No, no, you can't. I should be sure to remember my wife if I had one. Don't tell me about it—it will excite me.

MARY. Mother, he really must be kept quiet.

MRS MAITLAND. Oh, dear, it's all so mysterious and disquieting, Mary. I shall go round to the Rectory and tell the Canon about it. He is so wise.

MARY [*anxious to get her away*]. Yes, do, mamma. I'm sure that will be the best thing.

MRS MAITLAND [*going out*]. I shall be back in a minute. I shan't put on my hat. I'll just take my parasol to look respectable.

WELBURN. Where is she going?

MARY. To the Rectory. It is just across the green.

THE PARACHUTE.

WELBURN. That sounds very soothing—a Rectory across the green.

MARY. Yes. Now don't talk any more; try to be quite quiet. Are you comfortable?

WELBURN. Immensely.

MARY. Now close your eyes and I daresay you will go to sleep.

WELBURN. Yes, that's what I always do when I go to sleep—I close my eyes first.

MARY [humouring him]. Of course; then do it now.

WELBURN [*jumping up with a shriek*]. Ah, ha! you there! You standing there!

MARY. What is it? Why are you speaking so loud?

WELBURN. You don't think I'm mad? Don't you mind being left alone with someone who has dropped from the sky and has lost his memory?

MARY. Not in the least. I dealt with many worse things during the war.

WELBURN. Admirable one! Have you a good head, a ready brain, a resourceful mind?

MARY. Yes, I have all those.

WELBURN. I'll tell you what I want—I need a confederate.

MARY. What?

WELBURN. Oh, this time you think I'm mad, don't you?

MARY. Well, something like it.

WELBURN. Not in the least. I'm as sane as you are. Listen, I must have a confederate to get me out of this hole.

MARY. What hole?

WELBURN. Why, my disappearing from my home, jumping from an aeroplane, and tumbling into your garden.

THE PARACHUTE.

MARY. Your home! But I thought you had forgotten it!

WELBURN. Nothing of the kind.

MARY. Not lost your memory?

WELBURN. Of course not. That was only to put you off the scent.

MARY. Off the scent?

WELBURN. Yes, yes, yes. Now look here, my dear young lady—can I trust you?

MARY [*speaking very calmly*]. Certainly.

WELBURN. Very well then—this is my sad story. I'm tired of life—I'm tired of the world and of all the things that are happening in it.

MARY. And you wish to commit suicide? Yes, that is a very common symptom.

WELBURN. Not at all! On the contrary. I don't mean to take my own life—that is, I want to take it for my own and nobody else's. And my wife will insist on my sharing hers. It's a perfect mania with her, and I can't bear it any longer and I mean to disappear. She has opinions about everything in creation, and I have none!

MARY. None? That must be very dull.

WELBURN. Dull? If I were left to myself I shouldn't be dull for a moment. I have two cherished pursuits—golf and music. I play golf and I play the 'cello. And that would be enough for me. I don't want to know about the things they talk about in the papers. My wife does. She went to College, and a woman always comes away from the 'Varsity with her head chock full of ideas—I never knew one who didn't—it's something awful. And my wife has views about every blessed thing that's mentioned in the papers, and she will talk to me about them all. I can't stand it any longer. I don't want to hear about Politics or Commerce or New Art or Advanced Science,

THE PARACHUTE.

or the rates or the taxes or the Axes or inflammation of the lung or inflation of the currency or the Moplahs or the blacks or the whites or the browns, or the East and the West, and the Tigris, and the Thames, and Ireland, and Mesopotamia, and the Dublin Parliament whose name I can't pronounce, and the London Parliament whose doings I can't follow, and Bridge, and the film, and the censors, and the traffic, and the Czecho-Slovaks, and the Japanese, and the Murmanskis, and Bolsheviks, and the Colonies, and the bank rate, and deferred shares, and preferred shares, and committees, and conferences, and Coalitions, or France, or Belgium, or Italy, or America, and the Colonies, and the Dominion, and Australia, and housing questions, and the servant problem, and the League of Nations, and amalgamations, or reparations, or war babies, or adoption, or the Church, or the stage, or the Cubists, or the psycho-analysts, or the unemployed, and the doles, and the Poles, the South Pole, or the North Pole, or the Polish Poles, or the telephone, or the penny postage, and the trams, and the strikes, and the weather, and prize-fighting, and the football matches. She has views on 'em all! And she tries to make me share them by suggestion. Can you wonder that I fly?

MARY. Oh, is that why you came by aeroplane?

WELBURN. No, no, you mistake. I use the word fly in a metaphorical sense. I mean, can you wonder that I keep trying to escape?

MARY. Oh, you have done it before?

WELBURN. I have tried four times. The first time by train, the next by steamer, the third by car, the fourth on foot, and every time that too devoted woman has got me back. The moment I disappear she circulates a description of me and I'm found at once. It's up in all the police offices. 'A

THE PARACHUTE.

man of good appearance, looking between 35 and 40, of middle height, pleasant and genial countenance. Probably suffering from loss of memory; answers to the name of Tom.' You see that's enough to identify me at once.

MARY. Then do you suffer from loss of memory?

WELBURN. Of course I don't. But when I'm found I have to say something, so I pretend I don't know who I am.

MARY. And what happens next?

WELBURN [*groaning*]. Well, then she tries bringing my memory back by suggestion! And when I can't bear that any longer, I pretend I've got it back. And now this last—the fifth—time I've tried a new way. I've come by aeroplane and jumped out.

MARY. That ought to cover up your tracks.

WELBURN. Yes, I'll tell you what I did. I have a pal who is mad on flying and who was going to do a stunt in Norfolk, somewhere near King's Lynn, so I went to Paddington and took a ticket for a small station due west of London to put them off the scent—a place I saw in Bradshaw called Camperton.

MARY. Camperton! Oh, yes.

WELBURN. Never heard of it before. We went off north-east—at least I hope we did, but I believe the fellow lost his way or something went wrong. He was turning round and round and his confounded things made such a row I couldn't make him hear, so I thought I'd chance it and I jumped out. I have practised jumping with his parachute several times before. And now I haven't an idea where I am, but a good bit north-east of London, I hope.

MARY. Wretched man, you are five miles from Camperton.

WELBURN. Good heavens! Then I'm undone!

THE PARACHUTE.

She'll come down in the car and find me as sure as I'm alive. Oh, my dear girl, what am I to do? You'll help me, won't you?

MARY. Of course I will. She'll never think of looking for you here.

WELBURN. Won't she!

MARY [*looking from window*]. Oh, there's my mother! and the Rector coming. Quick, quick, lie down again.

[WELBURN *lies down and is covered*].

WELBURN. Who is the Rector?

MARY. Canon Hartley.

WELBURN. Hartley—not Bob Hartley?

MARY. Yes, his name is Robert.

WELBURN. Good Lord! He was with me at Oxford. We used to make music together, and he used to pretend I played out of tune. Good gracious, what are we to do?

MARY. You be quiet, and remember you have lost your memory, and I'll play up. I'm a great authority on shocks and accidents.

[Enter the RECTOR and MRS MAITLAND].

RECTOR [*heartily, but speaking with a little precaution*]. Well, Miss Mary, at work again! at work again!

MARY. Take care, Rector, I think he's dozing.

RECTOR. He's lost his memory, Mrs Maitland tells me.

MARY. Entirely.

RECTOR. These cases are most distressing. Have you no clue at all to where he came from or who he is?

MARY [*firmly*]. None whatever. The only thing we can do is to let him lie still for the present.

[WELBURN *groans*].

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RECTOR. He seems to be suffering, but it is uncertain. He may be quite unconscious that he is groaning. I have seen a good many of these cases and have indeed had a good deal of success in dealing with them. I should like to see this man, that I may judge for myself of his condition.

MARY. No, no, Rector—really if he is disturbed I will not answer for the consequences.

RECTOR [*stiffly*]. Really, my dear young lady, may I say that you take a little too much on yourself. It is most important to do everything we possibly can to prove this poor fellow's identity. As Rector of this parish I feel it to be my duty to investigate this case. [Goes toward WELBURN, and lifts up the cover. WELBURN rolls over with his face away from him and groans].

RECTOR [*soothingly*]. Now, now, my poor friend, I won't disturb you. [WELBURN groans again]. I only want to help.

WELBURN. Keep off ! Get out ! Go away ! [rolls over].

RECTOR. Do you know, I believe I know that voice !

MARY. You are exciting him dreadfully.

RECTOR. All the same, I think I know this man, and I must see his face. [He bends over WELBURN and succeeds in seeing his face]. Yes, I do ! Isn't that amazing !

MARY and MRS MAITLAND. You know him ?

RECTOR. Yes, unless I'm strangely mistaken, we were at Oxford together ; his name is Welburn.

MRS MAITLAND. How providential !

MARY. But are you sure you are not strangely mistaken ?

RECTOR. My dear young lady, older people are right sometimes.

THE PARACHUTE.

MARY. Everyone is mistaken at times.

MRS MAITLAND. Not the Rector.

RECTOR. It is my duty to do what we can to help my poor friend back to his normal condition. I shall interrogate him quite quietly—nothing to excite him. Welburn! Welburn! [WELBURN looks at him vaguely].

WELBURN. What does that mean?

RECTOR. Isn't that your name? Welburn, I said.

WELBURN. I can't remember what my name is. I don't know. I can't imagine.

RECTOR [to the others]. There isn't a doubt that it's Welburn. [To WELBURN]. Look here, old boy, don't you remember the good old times we had at Oxford when we used to make music together?

WELBURN. Music? No.

RECTOR. Don't you remember the Beethoven Sonata in A and that place in the last movement where you always got that E on the A string out of tune—

WELBURN [loudly]. Out of tune!

RECTOR [excited]. There, you see he remembers! Yes, yes; you remember that E.

WELBURN [catching himself up]. What E?

RECTOR. The E on the A string.

WELBURN. What's an A string? Why is there an E on it?

RECTOR. You know that surely: you used to be such a good 'cello player.

WELBURN. Good what?

RECTOR. 'Cello player—this sort of thing, you know. [Pretending to play on a 'cello. WELBURN looks at him vaguely, then tries to imitate him].

WELBURN. Oh, is that what it is? Like that? No, I don't remember. Why should I have done like that?

THE PARACHUTE.

MARY. I'm sure this must be doing him harm.

RECTOR. My dear girl, it is not. Leave him to me. He had a glimmer just now of recollection. It may gradually come back to him.—Come now, you remember the pretty girls at Somerville?

[WELBURN *shakes his head and groans again*].

RECTOR. Come now, nothing to groan at in that. Do you remember that charmer in pink? Who got a First, by Jove!

WELBURN. A First! [Groans].

RECTOR. Remember that?

WELBURN. Remember what?

RECTOR. The girl at Somerville.

WELBURN [blankly]. I don't know. The girl where?

RECTOR. At Somerville, dear friend, at Somerville. [To the others]. It needs an infinite patience and kindness to deal with these sad cases. At Somerville, the ladies' college, you know.

WELBURN. I don't know.

RECTOR. And yet at that time you seemed interested in her.

WELBURN. I tell you I don't remember. I remember nothing! I've lost my memory and I've lost my senses, and I don't know whom I am or how I came here or anything. And I don't know who you are and why you're going on talking.

RECTOR. Quite so, quite so, don't excite yourself, pray.

WELBURN. It's you who are exciting me with all this chattering and wanting me to remember this and remember that. You're doing me a great deal of harm, and I tell you what, if I don't know anything that happened in the past I do know what's going to happen in the future, and that is that I shall punch

THE PARACHUTE.

your head in a minute if you ask me any more questions—so now! [Behaves as if he were mad].

[He jumps up].

RECTOR [retreating]. Oh, pray, dear sir, keep calm. [Trying to smile]. No need for you to punch my head or any one else's.

WELBURN. I'm not so sure.

RECTOR [to the others]. What a sad condition to find him in. But there isn't a doubt that he's Welburn.

WELBURN. What's that you're saying—that I'm Welburn? What's that? Don't call me names. You take care not to say it again.

RECTOR. My dear sir, I won't say it if you don't like it. I'll leave you to rest a little longer, and I will call again.

WELBURN. No, don't you call again, please.

RECTOR. Dear sir, don't be agitated.

MARY. Now you lie down again, and you shall not be disturbed.

WELBURN. Thank you very much. [Lies down —MARY covers him and he draws the things over his head and groans].

MRS MAITLAND. Oh, Rector, what do you think about it? I do depend on your advice.

RECTOR. My dear lady, you are positively trembling. These harrowing scenes are not good for you. Come out into the air for a few minutes. Walk across the green with me to the Rectory; the air will do you good.

MRS MAITLAND [faintly]. Yes, I think I will. [To MARY]. We are within call if you want us.

MARY [ironically]. Thank you, mamma. [MARY watches them out of window]. They're gone.

[WELBURN sits up].

THE PARACHUTE.

WELBURN. The old fool badgering me about Oxford ! That was an inspiration, wasn't it, pretending to be mad. How was it ? Was that all right ?

MARY. Splendid.

WELBURN. Upon my word, I feel almost mad in reality when I think of his saying that I played out of tune, and raking up the Somerville girls, and all that.

MARY. Had you really forgotten the charmer in pink ?

WELBURN. Forgotten her ! [Groans]. How could I ? I married her.

MARY. What ! Was she —

WELBURN. My wife ? Of course she was—of course she *is*—that's the point I mind most.

MARY. She must be very clever if she took a First.

WELBURN. That's just it. She is—that's the awful part. Now I'm not clever, you know. I didn't take a First. She knows that, so she thinks she has a better head than I have, and upon my soul, I don't know what to do about it.

MARY. About your head ?

WELBURN. No, hers—I mean about hers and mine together. That's the mistake—

MARY. But you're trying to remedy it, by separating then ?

WELBURN. Yes, but I have never succeeded. That's where the brains come in, you see. Each time I try to get away and hide from her, she gets me back again. Oh ! if only I can pull it off this time.

[WELBURN gets up, pulls his coat down, etc., and begins strolling up and down, his hands in his pockets while he thinks it out].

MARY. Take care you're not seen from outside.

THE PARACHUTE.

It's all right—they're still talking at the Rectory gate. They're both wondering evidently what to do next.

WELBURN. I say, it's really awfully funny, isn't it?

[*They both laugh*].

MARY. I must say it is. But it'll take some doing, you know. What is your plan?

WELBURN. A very simple one. I shall be left some time with you to look after me, and when that happens you will avert your eyes for a moment, and I shall open the door and walk out. That's always the best thing to do when you're shut up anywhere if it can be managed.

MARY. If! Yes! But I'm game to do anything.

WELBURN. Look here, you really are one of the best. How can I ever thank you!

MARY. Well, really, I'm awfully grateful to you for having brought excitement into our lives.

WELBURN. Oh, they are coming back this way. Then I must subside again. [*Jumps on to couch. MARY covers him*].

MARY [*looking from window*]. Oh! this really is a wonderful day. Something else is happening. There's a car driving through the village—

WELBURN [*anxiously*]. A car?

MARY. It's going very slowly—it's going to stop.

WELBURN. It's detectives! I'm sure! I'm lost.

MARY. No, it's being driven by a lady—she's alone.

WELBURN. A lady! [*Gets under the rug*].

MARY. She is looking at a map. Now she is speaking to my mother. She must be asking the way—

WELBURN. Your mother will bring her in here, and I'm a dead man.

MARY. Yes—my mother is bringing her in.

THE PARACHUTE.

[Enter MRS MAITLAND and the RECTOR, with
MRS WELBURN].

MRS MAITLAND. Mary, I want the large scale map. This lady is asking the way to Camperton.

MRS WELBURN. Thank you very much. [She is tall and masculine looking, and speaks in a deep voice].

MRS WELBURN [looking at WELBURN]. You have an invalid here?

MRS MAITLAND. Yes, this poor gentleman fell from an aeroplane into our garden—at least he jumped from a parachute. He might have been killed.

MRS WELBURN. How much is he hurt?

MRS MAITLAND. I don't think he is very much hurt, but he is suffering from shock and loss of memory, and ought to be kept absolutely quiet.

MRS WELBURN. Loss of memory, indeed? I have a good deal of experience in dealing with loss of memory, as a near relation of mine frequently suffers from it. But I find that it always yields to suggestion. Have you tried that?

MARY. We have not. From the patient's condition it was evidently most essential that he should be kept quiet.

MRS WELBURN. Suggestion would do him no harm. You can suggest to a patient that he should be calm, and he becomes calm—and then after that it is very rare that loss of memory does not yield to further treatment—at least that is my experience.

RECTOR. I believe it would be a good thing to try suggestion in this case.

MRS WELBURN. Ah! You believe in it too? I am glad to hear this from one of your cloth.

RECTOR. I don't know that I do in every case. But this one has special interest for me, and I am

THE PARACHUTE.

anxious to try everything, as I know this man, although he has not so far recognised me.

MARY. He doesn't remember who he is himself.

MRS WELBURN. Quite a common symptom. But it is an extremely important factor in the case that you recognise him. Are you quite certain?

RECTOR. Absolutely. We were at Oxford together—his name is Welburn.

MRS WELBURN [*slowly*]. His name is Welburn? So is mine!

ALL. Yours!

MRS WELBURN [*advancing to couch and uncovering WELBURN*]. Of course, yes, that's my husband. He is always doing it. Thomas!

[WELBURN groans without moving].

MRS WELBURN. Yes, that's the way he groans in his sleep when he has one of these attacks. He has had four of them—and he wanders away from home unconscious of his actions.

MRS MAITLAND. Oh, how sad!

MRS WELBURN. But he always recovers. Thomas! [Shakes him].

MARY. Oh, I'm afraid you will do him harm.

MRS WELBURN. Young lady, I am much obliged to you for your kind care of my husband, but now you had better leave him to me.

RECTOR. Quite so. [He and MRS MAITLAND nod at one another approvingly].

[MRS WELBURN pulls WELBURN up—he sits up and looks blankly at her without recognition].

MRS WELBURN. Thomas! Do you know me?

WELBURN. I don't. Who are you?

MRS WELBURN. I am your wife.

WELBURN. My wife? I don't think I've got one. At least I can't remember. [As though trying to collect his thoughts].

THE PARACHUTE.

MRS WELBURN. Oh, you will remember presently. You'll get your memory back all right. Now look at me. Look straight into my eyes.

WELBURN. I don't like looking at you.

MRS WELBURN. He has these delusions at times, but they pass off. I will take him away with me in the car, at once, back to his home. Come, Thomas.

WELBURN. Where do you want me to go? [To MARY, with a forlorn hope]. Can't you help me? I don't like going away with this stranger.

MARY [to MRS WELBURN]. Do you mind my saying that we have no proof that this is your husband?

MRS MAITLAND. Oh, my dear Mary, it is so evident!

MRS WELBURN. No—now that was a sensible remark for a girl. Girls are generally foolish. You shall have proof. I can tell you what the motto and crest are on that signet ring he wears : the motto is *Semper Volans* and the crest is a swallow. Though a goose would have been more appropriate. [Takes his hand]. There you may see for yourself.

RECTOR. So it is. Oh, my dear madam, we have every confidence in you, and we have only to congratulate you and your husband on being brought together by such a wonderful chance.

MRS WELBURN. Thank you very much. Come then, dear, we must go. [Helping WELBURN up]. Lean on my arm—I daresay you still feel shaky.

[WELBURN looks round him desperately, then thrusts his arm through hers. They go towards the door].

MRS MAITLAND. Poor fellow!

MARY. Poor fellow, indeed!

RECTOR. I do hope he will soon recover his memory.

THE PARACHUTE.

MRS WELBURN. I am quite sure he will. It always yields to suggestion.

[WELBURN gives a loud groan, with one more look at MARY. They go out].

CURTAIN as they pass out.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

The plot of this piece was suggested to the writer by the late Charles Brookfield. Under the title of *An Underground Journey*, it was successfully produced at a benefit matinée at the Comedy Theatre in February, 1893, with the following cast :

THE DUKE OF PECKHAM RYE	CYRIL MAUDE.
A RAILWAY GUARD	WILLIAM WYES.
MRS JENNINGS	FANNY BROUH.

It has now been re-written and brought up to date.

F. B.
1922.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

Characters.

THE DUKE OF PECKHAM RYE.

TOM (*his friend*).

MRS JENNINGS.

A TICKET COLLECTOR.

A RAILWAY GUARD.

SCENE : *A second-class railway carriage on the S.E. Railway.*

At Victoria Station, S.E. Line. *A railway carriage seen endways; a passenger (TOM) in it reading a paper.*

GUARD [*opening door*]. Here you are, sir; this train for Penge.

[DUKE jumps into carriage breathless; GUARD whistles, train goes off. TOM in corner of carriage, reading paper, looks up].

TOM [*before seeing who it is*]. Ran it fine that time! [Sees DUKE] Hallo, it's you, Pecky!

DUKE. You, Tom! What an age since we've met.

TOM. Yes, it's a long time since the old Oxford days.

DUKE. Do you live in London?

TOM. Well—I live in Brixton.

DUKE. Brixton, do you?

TOM. Yes, we call it London.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

DUKE. Oh, do you? It's quite a nice name for it.

TOM. Yes, it sounds well. And which of your palaces are you living in at this moment?

DUKE. Only in Grosvenor Square. I'm going to sell Castle Peckham.

TOM. Are you?

DUKE. Of course.

TOM. What a pity.

DUKE. That's not the worst misfortune—I haven't a cook.

TOM. Has anybody?

DUKE. Very few, I believe—what *I* call a cook.

TOM. Are you flying from London, then?

DUKE. I'm going to look for one.

TOM. Well done! At Brixton?

DUKE. No, further away—she's at Penge.

TOM. Funny place to look for a cook.

DUKE. Why?

TOM. You'll know when you get there.

DUKE. The person I'm really looking for is her employer. She has a little country retreat outside Penge, made of five workmen's cottages knocked into one.

TOM [*disapprovingly*]. Five!

DUKE. Yes, I suppose there were no more to be had.

TOM. Very probable. Who is the employer?

DUKE. The Princess Blakowska.

TOM. A Princess! That promises well for the cook.

DUKE. Yes, I've been up to London, to try to find her in Berkeley Square. She was out. Now I'm going to see if she's at Penge. We've exchanged letters already—we've had a wonderful correspondence, even though it began on what is generally con-

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

sidered an unromantic subject. She came across my life at a time when it was overshadowed by misfortune; my French chef had just left me to go to America.

TOM. To be sure—he would.

DUKE. But she brought light into the gloom. I took up the *Times* one morning in despair.

TOM. Yes, lots of people feel that way when they take up the *Times*.

DUKE. But that day I found comfort in it. I scanned the advertisements; then I read, “A Russian Princess strongly recommends her admirable cook.” Imagine! I wrote to the Princess in words of burning anxiety. She answered. I wrote again. She replied by a letter breathing sympathy and comprehension in every line. Listen. [*He draws out letter and reads it*]. “The Princess Blakowska presents her compliments to the Duke of Peckham Rye. She deeply sympathises with the unfortunate predicament in which he finds himself, and will indeed be glad to hear that he has secured the services of an artist like Susan Jennings.” What feeling! What tenderness! How she understands! Don’t you see her? Can you not evoke her?

TOM. Well, I never had your imagination, you know, Pecky, especially as regards the ladies.

[*Train stops. Voice outside: Brixton !*]

Good-bye, old boy; good luck to you.

[*Gets out, shuts door after him and remains a moment leaning on it*].

DUKE. Do you like living here?

TOM. Very much. I have a wife and three children—and a cook!

DUKE. Wonderful family life!

TOM. Well, you buck up and get a family life, too. You are beginning at the right end, by the cook.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

Good-bye. Why do you travel second-class?

DUKE. Is it second? I meant to come third, like everyone else. I didn't know there were still seconds on this line.

[*Whistle sounds*].

TOM. Well, I'll leave you to your second-class solitude, unmolested by the millionaire or the pauper. [Goes off]. Ta, ta.

VOICE [*outside*]. Stop, stop! [Enter MRS JENNINGS *hurriedly*].

GUARD. Stop! We can't stop. Come along, ma'am, or you'll be left behind. [Opens door].

MRS JENNINGS [*on platform looking at carriage*]. Is it empty?

GUARD [*impatiently*]. This end's empty.

MRS JENNINGS [*looking in*]. But the other isn't. There's a man. Some careless woman's forgotten her husband in the carriage.

GUARD. Are you going to get in, ma'am? If you're not, the platform's empty. You can have *that* to yourself if you like.

[MRS JENNINGS gets in unwillingly: *Guard bangs door, whistles, train goes*].

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, what a dust! [sneezes violently].

DUKE [*waking with a start*]. Oh! I beg your pardon!

MRS JENNINGS [*leaning back and panting in her corner*]. What for?

DUKE. For—for—seeing you so suddenly.

MRS JENNINGS. Well, I could hardly come in gradually, could I?

DUKE. No, madam, no—certainly not.

[MRS JENNINGS pants].

DUKE [*sympathetically*]. You seem a little out of breath!

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

MRS JENNINGS [*sharply*]. Yes, I'm quite out of it for the moment. I hope to have another supply in shortly, if you would only let me be quiet.

DUKE. Certainly, certainly, madam. In fact I shall not be sorry to gasp a little more myself, too.

[*They both lean back*].

MRS JENNINGS [*after a pause, fanning herself*]. And the fellow putting me into a second-class carriage, too. I knew what would happen if I came second-class.

DUKE [*sympathetically*]. That you would pant?

MRS JENNINGS. Pant! No! I mean that in a second-class it's impossible to keep one's self to one's self as one would wish.

DUKE. Oh! You find it easier to be exclusive going third?

MRS JENNINGS. Third! I wasn't going third; I was going first, but I arrived in such a hurry, that I got into the carriage without stopping to look.

DUKE. That is exactly what happened to me, except that I meant to go third.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh! What! Am I travelling alone with a third-class passenger!

DUKE. You need not be alarmed, madam, I am the most harmless of men.

MRS JENNINGS. I will say you don't look much to be afraid of.

DUKE [*mortified*]. Oh, indeed! Thank you—thank you.

[*Leans back with his eyes shut*].

MRS JENNINGS [*aside, looking at him*]. He does look an inoffensive creature certainly.

DUKE [*opening his eyes, turning his collar up*]. There is a great draught in this carriage, don't you think so?

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, its rather like a breezy common.

DUKE. I think the wind is coming in at that side.

MRS JENNINGS. I have no doubt whatever about it. I can tell by my hat. [*Pulling her hat straight*].

DUKE. Suppose you were to sit in this corner opposite me? I think you would feel it less.

MRS JENNINGS. Thank you. Perhaps I should. [*Moves over*].

[DUKE goes to other end and shuts window].

MRS JENNINGS [*aside—looking at him*]. Friendly little man—a commercial traveller, of course. [*Aloud*]. Do you travel?

DUKE. Invariably, when I'm in the train.

MRS JENNINGS. Ah, but I mean in ribbons and laces and that sort of thing.

DUKE [*surprised*]. No, madam; I generally travel in tweed unless I am in London, when I wear a black coat, and generally a black face and hands as well, especially in the train.

MRS JENNINGS. It is true that the smuts are very disagreeable. I really have a hard struggle sometimes to be fit to be seen. [*Looking complacently at her clothes*].

DUKE. I must congratulate you, madam, on your success in the struggle.

MRS JENNINGS. In my position it is so very essential that I should be well dressed.

DUKE [*amused*]. In your position?

MRS JENNINGS [*firmly*]. Yes, in my position. Now I'm not going to tell you what it is, so you needn't think it.

DUKE. My dear madam, I never dreamt of being so indiscreet. I only meant that it is evident that you must shine in society.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I shine all right, no doubt about that.

DUKE [*gallantly*]. I can well imagine it. Have you been out much in London this season?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I've hardly had a moment to myself the whole of the summer.

DUKE. Indeed! Dinners, balls, parties, I suppose, every night?

MRS JENNINGS. Every night, yes!

DUKE. And which do you consider the most tiring form of entertainment?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, dinners, certainly—especially those very long ones.

DUKE. Ah, I see that like the rest of your sex, you don't seem to care much about the noble art of dining.

MRS JENNINGS. I assure you, you are very much mistaken. I flatter myself that if anyone in Europe understands that art, I do.

DUKE. Oh, then, how much we have in common!

MRS JENNINGS [*scornfully*]. You and me?

DUKE. Yes, don't you feel it yourself?

MRS JENNINGS. No, I can't say that I do. I don't like having much in common with people I meet in the train.

DUKE. Why not?

MRS JENNINGS. One never knows who they are.

DUKE. That is the beauty of it. I think that going about unknown is rather enjoyable.

MRS JENNINGS. It's a cheap enjoyment at any rate. [*Whistle heard*]. Oh, there's a horrid tunnel. Now we shall be smothered.

[*The stage becomes dark*].

DUKE [*loud*]. What a horrid noise!

MRS JENNINGS. What!

DUKE. What a horrid noise!

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

MRS JENNINGS. I can't hear.

DUKE. What?

MRS JENNINGS. I can't hear.

DUKE. I don't know what you say!

MRS JENNINGS. Hold your tongue—do!

DUKE [shouting]. What!

[She makes him violent signs. The stage grows light again].

MRS JENNINGS. What do you chatter for?

DUKE. Chatter, my dear madam? I thought you made a remark which I didn't quite catch.

MRS JENNINGS. You needn't have run after it in the tunnel.

DUKE. I really must apologise—it was my natural anxiety not to lose what you said.

MRS JENNINGS. Come, come, my good man, none of your cheap compliments. I'd keep those for third-class passengers if I were you.

DUKE [dignified]. Cheap, madam?

[Voice outside: Herne Hill!].

TICKET COLLECTOR [opens door]. Tickets, please.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I'm in the wrong class!

TICKET COLLECTOR. You must pay the difference, please, m'm.

MRS JENNINGS. Why?

TICKET COLLECTOR. Because it's the Company's rules. Come, be quick, please, m'm. A third-class passenger has no business in a second-class carriage.

MRS JENNINGS [indignantly]. Third-class! Now do I look like a third-class passenger?

TICKET COLLECTOR. Dear me, yes! Thirds is often smarter than firsts nowadays.

MRS JENNINGS. Well, I've got a first-class ticket. Now, perhaps you will tell me what the difference is and pay me.

TICKET COLLECTOR. No, I'm not going to pay

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

you anything, m'm. It's no look-out of the Company's if parties choose to worsen themselves; but if you've got a first-class ticket, m'm, you may stay where you are, free of charge.

MRS JENNINGS [*sarcastically*]. Very kind, I'm sure.

DUKE. There'll be something to pay on my ticket. I think mine is a third-class.

TICKET COLLECTOR. Something to pay? I should rather think there is. Why can't you gents and ladies sort yourselves properly before you start, instead of mixing the Company's accounts in this way? It's sixteen and two-thirds per cent. since just before the Bank Holiday, added to 50 per cent. in January, 1918. [*Does a rapid sum*]. That comes to $4\frac{1}{2}$ d. from Victoria to Penge.

[DUKE is also busy with a pencil and paper].

DUKE. I can't check these figures in such a hurry. How is it worked?

TICKET COLLECTOR. By your paying me $4\frac{1}{2}$ d., now, if you please. The train's late as it is.

DUKE. The railway company must make a good deal of money in these days, I should think.

TICKET COLLECTOR [*pocketing money*]. Well, sir, if time is money as people say, the Company must have lost a good deal of it at this station, through you keeping me here talking. Why, all the windows of the train is black with heads sticking out of them to know what we're waiting here for.

[*Waves flag, whistles and disappears*].

MRS JENNINGS. If I had thought of it, I might have got into a first-class at Herne Hill, and have avoided all this bother.

DUKE. That would have been cruel of you.

MRS JENNINGS. Cruel? Why?

DUKE. Because you would have left me alone.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

MRS JENNINGS. Now look here, my good friend, just stick to your travelling and don't make any more pretty speeches to me; that's the worst of third-class people, you never know what they will say next.

DUKE. But my dear madam, I trust I have not said anything very startling—as yet.

MRS JENNINGS. No, not as yet, but I daresay you will in a minute.

DUKE. Well—I might be able to think of something—

MRS JENNINGS. Now, you take care what you're about. I know what travellers are.

DUKE. I should have thought that travelling made people pleasanter.

MRS JENNINGS. Ah! I see you don't understand—Never mind, I might have expected it, for you don't look very bright. I wonder where I put my newspaper. Oh, there it is.

DUKE [*handing it to her*]. Allow me.

MRS JENNINGS [*opens it out; reads*]. Thank you.

DUKE. Do you consider the *Ladies' Pictorial* an agreeable paper?

MRS JENNINGS [*behind paper*]. Particularly agreeable—when I can enjoy it in peace. [*Holding up paper between them*].

DUKE [*half to himself*]. I, on the contrary, dread being left alone with my own thoughts! For I am haunted, possessed by one idea—the thought of that beautiful unknown—that lovely Russian I am seeking. [*Looking cautiously at his companion*]. Don't go on reading too long, madam; do talk to me again. Your fresh unconventionality takes me out of myself.

MRS JENNINGS [*moves her paper to one side, and looks angrily at him*]. My fresh what?

DUKE. Unconventionality.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

MRS JENNINGS [*returning to her paper*]. I'll thank you not to use that language to me.

DUKE. I beg your pardon, I'm sure.

MRS JENNINGS. Granted. Now do be quiet and let me read my paper in peace.

DUKE [*with a sigh*]. Very well. [*He sits silent*]. [MRS JENNINGS returns to paper and reads. Then she gives a shriek. DUKE, startled, looks up].

DUKE. Dear lady, what is it?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, such a thing I've found in this paper.

DUKE. What is it? Has the Government gone out again?

MRS JENNINGS. Not it! Something much more important! Here's a recipe for tomatoes with cream, which I've been looking for all my life.

DUKE [*much excited*]. Tomatoes! Oh, how immensely interesting! I am passionately fond of tomatoes!

MRS JENNINGS. So am I!

DUKE. I've been longing to find a new way of cooking them.

MRS JENNINGS. So have I! And now I shall know it!

DUKE. So shall I!

MRS JENNINGS. Listen! "Cut off the tops, scoop out the seeds without breaking the outer skin—put them into a large stew pan—

DUKE [*listening intently*]. The seeds?

MRS JENNINGS [*impatiently*]. No, no, man! The tomatoes! "Put them in a stew pan with a gill of oil"—that's the secret of frying, mind you. Oil, not butter! Frying oil, the very best oil!

DUKE. Oh, an intelligent woman!

MRS JENNINGS. "Chop up some button mushrooms, some parsley, some endive, some celery, some

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

olives, some oysters, some minced ham, and some fat bacon ; fry all together for five minutes, add the yolks of two eggs and a tablespoonful of the thickest cream ; fill some patties with the mixture, bake for ten minutes and serve. This makes a delicious dish." I'm sure it must be ! A dish fit for a Duke !

DUKE. For a Duke—it must, indeed !

MRS JENNINGS. And to think I should have taken up the paper accidentally and come upon it all at once !

DUKE [*with feeling*]. Yes, indeed ! It was a rare piece of good fortune. I am glad to see, madam, that you are interested in cookery.

MRS JENNINGS. I am, indeed ! More than in anything else.

DUKE. Oh, how I admire you for it ! Now that is my ideal of what a woman's interest in life should be. I love to picture her graceful feminine intelligence playing round such things as—as—

MRS JENNINGS. Tomatoes—

DUKE. Exactly. Tomatoes, or some other fragrant product of the soil. There is to me something repulsive in the idea of a woman's mind endeavouring to grapple with magisterial problems or political research. No ! Let her rather spend hours of patient investigation amongst her saucepans, endeavouring to wring from them their secrets.

MRS JENNINGS. It doesn't take me as long as that, I can tell you, to find out if a saucepan is clean or dirty.

DUKE. I was thinking of the finer problems of the saucepan, the delicate combinations which reveal the true artist. Tell me, dear lady, do you ever go into your kitchen, and play the part of tutelary genius of your establishment ?

MRS JENNINGS. Into my kitchen !!! I should think so ! I'm hardly ever out of it.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

DUKE. I was sure of it. I picture you flitting to and fro, presiding over the culinary labours of the day, surrounded by a bevy of deft and noiseless maidens —

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, as to that, the less we say about them, the better. Kitchen-maids are a set of careless, chattering hussies. They break the plates and burn the vegetables, and then they say their mothers are ill and they must go away.

DUKE [*puzzled*]. Oh ! Are they such good daughters ?

MRS JENNINGS [*contemptuously*]. Good fiddle-de-dees !

[*Voice outside : Dulwich !*]

MRS JENNINGS [*in excitement*]. Oh, look !

DUKE [*springing up and looking out*]. What is it ?

MRS JENNINGS. Can't you see for yourself ?

DUKE [*craning*]. I see nothing particular.

MRS JENNINGS. Nothing particular ? [Pointing].

DUKE. Except the Crystal Palace. Is *that* what you mean ?

MRS JENNINGS. Well, isn't that enough for you ?

DUKE. Oh, quite enough, I assure you.

MRS JENNINGS. Of course it's the Crystal Palace ; there it is, shining away like aything.

DUKE. Do you consider it beautiful ?

MRS JENNINGS. Beautiful ? Never thought about that, but it's a most wonderful place.

DUKE. Oh, yes. The concerts you mean, and the fireworks.

MRS JENNINGS. I don't hold much with concerts, or fireworks either. It's the restaurant I am thinking of—the most wonderful restaurant with a chef in it who's the best in Europe, they say.

DUKE. Ah, that is wonderful, indeed.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

MRS JENNINGS. I believe you. They say the Crystal Palace will soon get up again in the world if he stays there.

[*She is looking out of the window all this time. Whistle outside. Train goes on. She continues to read her paper.*].

MRS JENNINGS [*reading her paper*]. Ah, here is something in your line—autumn fashions and materials.

DUKE. In my line?

MRS JENNINGS. Isn't that the line you take in your travelling?

DUKE [*gallantly*]. Sometimes, madam, when I am travelling my attention is forcibly called to these things—when I have such exquisite specimens of the art under my eyes.

MRS JENNINGS. There you are again with your pretty speeches—but I must say I think I do look rather nice to-day. I've a particular reason.

DUKE [*looking at her admiringly*]. It must be a very particular reason that would justify such a hat as that.

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, the hat I must admit is rather a triumph. You'd hardly believe that it's a last year's hat, would you?

DUKE. Last year's! Never!

MRS JENNINGS. It is though; it's a hat warmed up again, so to speak.

DUKE [*politely*]. But not hashed!

MRS JENNINGS. No, not hashed, I flatter myself. All my friends tell me it looks like a hat from Paris.

DUKE. So it does!

MRS JENNINGS. The fact is that last year, when I was in Paris, I saw one just like it and copied it.

DUKE. Ah, that explains everything. Do you know Paris well?

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, yes. I've been a good deal in Paris. I studied there—[catching herself up]

DUKE. Studied ! What ?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, never you mind what ; things a woman ought to know.

DUKE. I didn't know such things could be learnt in Paris.

MRS JENNINGS. Ah, that's because you're a John Bull, my good friend, and haven't seen enough of the world. You should try to get leave, and travel on the Continent for a month or so. It opens one's mind considerably.

DUKE. Have you been much abroad ? Your mind seems to be particularly open.

MRS JENNINGS. Yes. I don't think there is much of the oyster about me.

DUKE. Where else have you been ?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, pretty much all over—to Germany, to Italy, and to all sorts of foreign watering places.

DUKE [starting]. Foreign watering places ? Have you ever met any Russian Princesses ?

MRS JENNINGS. Russian Princesses ! I should think so, all over the place. They're as common as blackberries !

DUKE [disconcerted]. As common as blackberries !

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, dear, yes ! Russian Princesses of all kinds, good, bad, and indifferent.

DUKE. I wonder to which of those kinds a Princess belong that I am interested in ?

MRS JENNINGS. What's her name ?

DUKE. Princess Blakowska—

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I know her quite well.

DUKE [thrilled]. You know her ?

MRS JENNINGS. Intimately. [DUKE is thrilled

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with excitement]. I should call her one of the indifferent ones—indifferent to what people say about them, I mean.

DUKE. Princess Blakowska ! But I imagine her to be a most delightful charming woman.

MRS JENNINGS. So she is, most beguiling—most fascinating, but, after all, that is not the way to prevent people talking about you. A good many people seem to talk about Princess Blakowska.

DUKE. Do they indeed ? [Saddened].

MRS JENNINGS [nodding her head]. Lots.

DUKE. Oh, do tell me what sort of a woman she is.

MRS JENNINGS. Very good looking—

DUKE. I was sure of it—

MRS JENNINGS. Very elegant looking; she is about my height and figure. We can quite well wear each other's clothes. She's got rather a temper.

DUKE. A temper !

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, yes ! And it's that—and other things that made it rather difficult—[she checks herself]. But in one respect she would be a woman after your own heart.

DUKE. I've no doubt she would !

MRS JENNINGS. She has a passion for cookery.

DUKE. I knew it !

MRS JENNINGS. She understands more about dining than any other woman I ever met.

DUKE. Oh, what a delightful friend to have !

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, she is ! She has been a very good friend to me, I must say, until—until we parted company. But why are you so interested in her? Do you know her?

DUKE. No, I don't know her exactly—but—from what I have heard and imagine of her, I should like to.

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MRS JENNINGS. I daresay you would. Lots of people feel the same.

DUKE. To tell you the truth, I have been making an attempt to see her to-day, but without success. I went to her house in Berkeley Square, but now I am trying elsewhere.

MRS JENNINGS. But I thought you didn't know her.

DUKE [*embarrassed*]. No more I do, but we've been exchanging letters.

MRS JENNINGS. Exchanging letters?

DUKE [*with a face of rapture*]. Yes, yes; I've had two letters from her.

MRS JENNINGS [*looking at him with a sudden thought*]. I wonder if you are looking for something, too?

DUKE. Something?

MRS JENNINGS [*archly*]. Something connected with a situation—for someone . . .

DUKE. I am, indeed.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I see; that explains everything.

DUKE [*puzzled*]. Explains everything?

MRS JENNINGS. Your interest in tomatoes . . .

[*Voice outside: Sydenham Hill! Train stops*].

MRS JENNINGS [*jumping up*]. Oh, look! look!

DUKE. What is it this time?

MRS JENNINGS [*pointing*]. Don't you see?

DUKE. I see the Crystal Palace again. Is it still that?

MRS JENNINGS. Of course. And here you get another view of it. You see that bulge in the roof?

DUKE. Oh, yes; you mean the dome—

MRS JENNINGS. Well, whatever it's called, there's where the restaurant is. Oh, it does shine, doesn't it? Oh, what a place, isn't it? I do love seeing it.

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[*Loud whistle: train moves*].

There now we don't see it again till we get to Beckenham.

DUKE. What a pity ! I get out at Penge.

MRS JENNINGS. Look here, my good friend, I'll give you a word of advice. It isn't my business, I daresay, but if I were you, I don't think I'd try for the Princess Blakowska.

DUKE [*embarrassed*]. Try—for her?

MRS JENNINGS. I don't think it's a situation you'd like.

DUKE. A situation I should like !

MRS JENNINGS. At least, I know it's a situation other people haven't liked.

DUKE. Other people !

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, dear me, yes ! She's always changing !

DUKE. Always changing !

MRS JENNINGS. Always. You know your own business best, of course, but there's a word to the wise for you, if you choose to take it. After all, these things are always a gamble, one never knows how they will turn out.

DUKE [*bewildered*]. A gamble ?

MRS JENNINGS. I'm embarked on the same sort of adventure myself—I'm going for the Duke of Peckham Rye.

DUKE [*bounding from his seat*]. What, madam ?

MRS JENNINGS. I daresay it won't be an altogether easy job. They say he's a queer customer sometimes.

DUKE. Queer customer !

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, very.

DUKE. I wonder what else they say about him !

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, they say he's rather a fogey, of course.

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DUKE. A fogey!

MRS JENNINGS. And very fond of the ladies.

DUKE [*pleased*]. Oh, is he?

MRS JENNINGS. And that he can't be five minutes with one without making himself agreeable to her.

DUKE. Well, I don't call that a fault.

MRS JENNINGS. No, I daresay not, but I know nothing about that, of course, as my relations with him have been entirely on a business footing.

DUKE. Your relations with him?

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, we have been exchanging letters for the last week.

DUKE. Exchanging letters for the last week! [With a sudden idea—*aside*]. Ha! can it be that—no—it is not possible!

MRS JENNINGS. You'd never guess what subject he's been corresponding with me about—not quite the sort of thing you'd expect from a Duke.

DUKE [*aside*]. I really believe it is! [Aloud] Can it be the subject we were speaking about just now? Is it—

MRS JENNINGS. Cooking? Yes, it is! Now what do you think of that for the Duke of Peckham Rye?

DUKE. Madam, [with emotion] your words almost convince me that what I have been expecting is a certainty—yes, I have guessed your secret!

MRS JENNINGS [*amazed*]. My secret. [With an idea]. Oh, you have guessed that what you are trying for, I am very near to?

DUKE [*bewildered*]. What I am trying for?

MRS JENNINGS. Well, then, to speak plainly—Princess Blakowska.

DUKE [*excited*]. Ah! You admit how nearly the mention of that name has touched you.

MRS JENNINGS. What's the use of denying it?

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DUKE. No good ! It would be useless, for my heart tells me too surely that I am right.

MRS JENNINGS. Your heart ! What's that got to do with it ?

DUKE. From the moment you spoke, I was interested in you. It began to dawn on me who you were—you spoke of being abroad in foreign watering places—interested in cookery. A wild thought darted into my mind, but I hardly dared to hope. [MRS JENNINGS *alarmed*]. Then you told me of your correspondence with the Duke, and my heart filled with delight.

MRS JENNINGS [*alarmed, aside*]. The man is mad, I do believe !

DUKE. Now I know that you are she whom I have been seeking ! Oh, what unlooked for happiness ! You are the Princess Blakowska !

MRS JENNINGS. I, the Princess Blakowska !

DUKE. Yes, I have discovered your secret—don't try to conceal it any more.

MRS JENNINGS [*terrified, looks at him*]. Oh !

DUKE. You are, aren't you ? Oh, say I am right !

MRS JENNINGS [*humouring—heartily*]. Of course, yes, of course ! I am the Princess Blakowska.

DUKE. Oh, what unlooked for good fortune ! That after thinking of you, dreaming of you, going across London to seek you in vain, Providence should bring us together !

MRS JENNINGS [*aside*]. This is horrible ! He is quite out of his mind ! Oh, what shall I do ? Where is the cord of communication with the guard ! Outside that window probably ! [Aloud]. I feel a little faint—I should like to have some air. [Goes to window].

DUKE. Oh, pray let me !

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MRS JENNINGS. No, thank you ! I would rather do it myself !

[Goes to window, DUKE standing too].

DUKE. Do let me !

MRS JENNINGS. No, no, I tell you. [Puts her hand out, gropes wildly about]. Nothing ! [Tries to shut window].

DUKE. Now, really, you must let me do that for you.

MRS JENNINGS [returning quickly to her seat, aside]. They're so fearfully strong at times !

DUKE [struggling]. This is certainly a stiff window.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, where can that cord be ? [Sees a printed notice—reads it]. No, the story of a man who was fined forty shillings for travelling in the wrong class. I shall have to pay £2 for travelling with a madman !

DUKE. At last !

[Comes back and sits beside MRS JENNINGS. She jumps into DUKE's seat opposite].

DUKE [smiling tenderly]. And now, dear Princess, that I know your name, will you not try and guess mine ?

MRS JENNINGS [aside]. This is positively awful ! It's like a fairy tale. He'll eat me if I don't guess right.

DUKE. Can't you guess ?

MRS JENNINGS. Well, I'm not sure !

DUKE. It is a name which is not unknown.

MRS JENNINGS [pretending to have an idea]. I have it ; you are a dethroned king !

DUKE [disappointed]. No—you are laughing at me—I am not a king.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, well—you are a Duke, then !

DUKE. A Duke, yes !

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MRS JENNINGS [*aside*]. Lucky shot !

DUKE. Is it possible you can still doubt who I am, after the letters we have exchanged ? [MRS JENNINGS *bewildered*]. I am the Duke of Peckham Rye !

MRS JENNINGS [*humouring him*]. Oh, indeed, yes ! The Duke of Peckham Rye ! Very nice, indeed !

DUKE [*aside*]. How curiously she takes it ! She doesn't seem a bit interested. [*Aloud*]. I hoped, madam, after what had passed between us, that you would, perhaps, not be sorry that we should meet.

MRS JENNINGS. Of course, yes—I am delighted to make your acquaintance.

DUKE. Shall I confess to you with what a subtle mysterious charm my fancy had already, and rightly, invested you ? The very paper on which your letters were written, the perfume which clung to them was dear to me.

MRS JENNINGS [*trying to conceal her uneasiness*]. Oh, yes, indeed, yes ! Most kind of you, I'm sure !

DUKE. I have them next my heart—see, here they are !

[*Brings out packet of letters, shows her the cover of one*].

MRS JENNINGS [*starts and shrieks*]. What—what do I see ! Princess Blakowska's hand-writing !

DUKE. Your own writing—yes, of course.

MRS JENNINGS [*agitated*]. But tell me—tell me quickly—how did you get that letter ?

DUKE [*surprised*]. In the simplest way in the world, since it was addressed to me—my name's on the envelope !

MRS JENNINGS [*gasping*]. What—the Duke of Peckham Rye ! It is not possible that you are really ! Oh !

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DUKE [*alarmed*]. What can be the matter, my dear Princess?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, Princess! Was there ever such a situation as this? It is awful!

DUKE [*aside*]. Upon my word, I believe she is not quite right!

[MRS JENNINGS suddenly bursts into fits of laughter. DUKE looks excessively alarmed. MRS JENNINGS hides her face in her hands, rocks backwards and forwards].

DUKE [*looking at her terrified*]. That is the way a maniac laughs for nothing. I wonder if there is a cord. Perhaps, madam, you would like a little air? [Goes to window, lets it down, and feels furtively about outside]. [Sadly]. No, there is nothing.

MRS JENNINGS [*going into fresh fits of laughter*]. It's no use—I've already looked!

DUKE [*more and more mystified*]. You—have—already—looked?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I must laugh! I do beg you pardon, your Grace, but the whole thing is too extraordinarily absurd. You would never guess for whom I took you!

DUKE. For whom did you take me?

MRS JENNINGS. First for a commercial traveller—

DUKE. A commercial traveller!

MRS JENNINGS. And then—and then—oh, it is too dreadful!—for a cook!

DUKE. A cook! Me!

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, you, your Grace! Did you ever hear anything like it; but, after all, you took me for a Princess.

DUKE. But who are you, then? You told me you were the Princess Blakowska.

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, but I'm not—I told you that to humour you.

DUKE. Upon my word! To humour me?

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MRS JENNINGS. Yes ! Because I thought you were mad.

DUKE. And I thought *you* were mad. One of us is, certainly !

MRS JENNINGS. It isn't me !

DUKE. Then why were you laughing in that insane way ?

MRS JENNINGS [*laughing again*]. I was laughing to think how surprised you would be if you knew who I was.

DUKE. And who are you then? [*Impatiently*].

MRS JENNINGS [*hesitating*]. Oh, your Grace ! you will never forgive me !

DUKE. Well, what is it ?

MRS JENNINGS. Look inside your letter again, your Grace, the one Princess Blakowska wrote to you.

DUKE. What is all this mystery about? [*Opens letter and reads*]. "She will be glad to hear that he has secured the services of an artist like Susan Jennings." Well ?

MRS JENNINGS. Now, can't you guess who I am ? I am not the Princess Blakowska, your Grace, I am not, indeed ; and yet—that letter concerns me.

DUKE [*gasping, looks at her transfixed*]. What ! Is it possible that you are—

MRS JENNINGS. Susan Jennings ! Yes ! Oh, pray forgive me, it is not my fault that you thought I was the Princess.

DUKE. And you're the cook ! [MRS JENNINGS bows her head silently]. What a precious fool I've been making of myself. But then why did you pretend you were somebody else ? You said you were a first-class passenger.

MRS JENNINGS [*with dignity*]. Excuse me, your Grace ! I didn't pretend. I had to come first because I'm on my way to call on your Grace. I'm still with

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the Princess at Penge till the end of the week. I went to your house at Grosvenor Gardens, and you were out, and now I am going back. I thought it was more suitable, everything considered, that I shouldn't run the risk of travelling with servants or people of inferior position.

DUKE. But my dear Princess—I mean, my dear madam—tut-tut—I mean, my good woman, what do you call yourself?

MRS JENNINGS. An artist.

DUKE. An artist! Yes, that was what the Princess said.

MRS JENNINGS. And, oh, your Grace, I *should* like to try those tomatoes for you.

DUKE. Those tomatoes! Well, Mrs Jennings, if you are sure you can be discreet and silent, and will reveal to no one what has passed between us to-day—

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, the grave is chatty, I do assure you, compared to me.

[*Voice outside: Penge!* GUARD puts his head inside window unseen by them].

DUKE. Very well, then, you may consider yourself engaged.

MRS JENNINGS [*enraptured*]. Engaged! Oh!!

GUARD [*loud*]. Penge! [DUKE and MRS JENNINGS start and pick up papers, etc.]. Well, this is a business-like betrothal as ever I see! [Aloud]. This is your station, sir. Better come out and have the rest of the ceremony on the platform.

DUKE [*getting out*]. Look here, my man—none of your insolence!

[DUKE gets out loftily].

MRS JENNINGS [*speaking to GUARD at window*]. You mustn't speak to him like that; he's the Duke of Peckham Rye.

A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

GUARD. Ah, yes, likely ! And you're a Member of Parliament, I suppose. All right !

[*He walks a little further away*].

DUKE [*coming to window—says hesitatingly*]. One thing I should like to ask, Mrs Jennings—I believe it is customary—why did you leave Princess Blakowska ?

MRS JENNINGS [*sarcastically*]. Why? Well, of course, I left her—with her goings on !

DUKE [*startled*]. What !

[CURTAIN comes down quickly as the GUARD's whistle is heard].

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